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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

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ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 15 juillet 2020

Report continued from volume A.

COVID-19 ECONOMIC RECOVERY
ACT, 2020

LOI DE 2020 VISANT À FAVORISER
LA REPRISE ÉCONOMIQUE
FACE À LA COVID-19

Continuation of debate on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 197, An Act to amend various statutes in response to COVID-19 and to enact, amend and repeal various statutes / Projet de loi 197, Loi modifiant diverses lois pour faire face à la COVID-19 et édictant, modifiant et abrogeant diverses lois.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): It's now time for questions.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Thank you to the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane for your presentation. It's a long time to speak.

I noted your references throughout the presentation to lack of broad engagement and consultation. I take it that sections 1, 3 and 20, which deal with municipalities and the municipality recovery part of that—you recall that one speaks about development charges and the benefits that derive to communities from that. It's a three-phased approach, as you'd recall from going through the bill.

Will you stand in your place today and say if you support the reforms that are in this legislation that will help 440 municipalities in Ontario?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I return to the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane for your response.

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you for that question.

When I was speaking about broad consultation, what I was referring to was that it was our hope that, now that it's been proposed, this bill itself will have broad consultation through the committee process, so the municipalities can actually make sure that now that the bill has been fully presented, they can once again have a full view and a full commentary on how this bill will impact them.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thanks to the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane for his one-hour lead on Bill 197.

Today the Canadian Federation of Independent Business released research as to the economic state of what's happening in Canada right now. They found that individual small businesses took on \$135,000 worth of debt on average, to a total of \$117 billion in debt. One of their major issues was, of course, rent.

Can the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane speak to the importance that businesses receive some made-in-Ontario provincial rent support, so that the debt does not cripple them and does not compromise our economic recovery as a province?

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you for the comment from the member for Waterloo.

The member from Waterloo has spent a lot of time on the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, and we heard it time and time again that small businesses are having an incredibly hard time. Many of them haven't been able to qualify for a lot of federal programming. They have taken on a lot of debt and have requested a provincial top-up on rent.

The province has responded with deferrals on taxes. A tax deferral is basically a delay of an execution. That's what it is. What those businesses need now is they need help from the province. Where the federal programs haven't been effective, the province needs to step in.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Mike Harris: It's always a pleasure to take part in debate here in this House. I always love when we get to hear the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane. He always speaks so eloquently and always brings up a couple of interesting anecdotes, which I appreciate, especially when he talks about northern Ontario.

Being from North Bay originally—he may argue that that's not quite northern Ontario, but I'm going to say that it is. Being from the north and spending a lot of time in his riding over the years—I have lots of friends who live up there—the highway system is dismal at the best of times, especially when you look at frost heaves and a lot of the different problems that you have with the winters that you experience in northern Ontario.

I was wondering if he might be able to elaborate a little bit—and I kind of asked this question in a similar fashion to the minister earlier—about what being able to fast-track highway construction projects would mean to the people of his riding, rather than having to wait for many, many years to get things started, to see them happen a lot quicker.

Mr. John Vanthof: I think every northerner would agree that the faster you can make the highway system better, the better, provided that it is safe and is not destructive to the environment.

Just north of North Bay, there is the Pan Lake corner, which was built quickly and has never been safe. So we should take that into account.

I'd like to thank the Minister of Transportation for meeting with Mark Wilson of the GEMS committee,

because they are putting forward a proposal for a pilot project for a two-plus-one highway—so to have a passing lane, but a divided highway. It has been done in other areas and it's very safe, and it would be a great idea if we could do that here, at least to try it.

Thank you for the opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

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Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane for your one-hour lead.

What I notice when I read through the COVID-19 economic recovery bill is the lack of any kind of support for parents to have the kind of child care and the schooling they need to get back to work.

Can you share some of the stories that you were hearing from residents in your riding about this issue?

Mr. John Vanthof: In my remarks, I mentioned my spouse, who works at a restaurant. The people she works with—many are single moms, and the lack of child care means that they can't earn a living. Now there are programs, but when those programs are over, if the affordable child care program isn't addressed, they won't be able to go back to work.

I also hear, Speaker, from employers who call me—Mathew, who works in a car dealership in Kirkland Lake, called me. Three to four people, every day, can't come in because of the lack of child care. What is the government going to do about it? Is that addressed in this bill?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Ms. Goldie Ghamari: I listened intently to the member's comments. I know that the member comes from a farming background, and farming and agriculture are really important, especially in my riding, in Carleton. We know that it's one of the backbones of our economy.

One of the things that Bill 197 does is, it provides a mechanism for a farmer to appeal an administrator's decision, and it further clarifies sections related to the franco-phone organization's ability to enjoy the same benefits around renewal of eligibility as accredited farm organizations. Our Bill 197 is essentially proposing to administratively update the farm business registration program.

So my question to the member is: Why is he so opposed to a bill that is actually helping farmers get involved in the appeal and licensing process?

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you very much for that question specifically around agriculture.

I stated in my remarks that there were parts of this omnibus bill that we weren't opposed to and that I'm not opposed to, but that is the nature of an omnibus bill. The government puts in parts that are palatable and other parts that aren't, and then that gives the opportunity for government members to say, "Well, they voted against this. They voted against farmers," which isn't true. They put a part in that bill to basically divide, and again, that part of the bill has very little to do with restarting the economy due to COVID-19.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions? Very quickly, the member from Beaches–East York.

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: Thank you, Speaker. We keep talking about how COVID-19 has exposed inequities in Ontario's system so that we don't want to go back to normal, the way it was. What are some of the things that you'd like to see put in to build back better and more equitably?

Mr. John Vanthof: This bill should have included things that actually help the people who have been most impacted by COVID-19, to go back to being able to fully participate in the Ontario society we love, like child care, like education, like the confidence that your elders are being treated well in long-term care.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Hon. Jeff Yurek: I'm glad to be here on a mid-summer afternoon to debate Bill 197. I thank all my colleagues for being here. It's the middle of summer. I'm sure we'd all like to be in our constituencies, hard at work with our constituents, but we're here today to debate this bill. I'd like to say hello to my daughter, who's at home doing summer school. I'm sure she's not watching me right now, but I'm going to say hi to her anyway. I'm sure she's hard at work doing her math course. Best of luck on that. It finishes in another few weeks; good for her.

I'm glad to join my colleagues here. Associate Minister of Transportation Kinga Surma has already spoken and talked about our government's proposed changes as they would impact transit-related projects. My colleague the Minister of Transportation, Caroline Mulroney, has discussed the legislative amendments in Bill 197 that will help get critical highway and other transportation-related projects built faster.

I would like to talk today about the legislative amendments in Bill 197 that will help modernize Ontario's Environmental Assessment Act and contribute to a cleaner, stronger and more prosperous Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, the COVID-19 outbreak has created unprecedented challenges to our province's health and economic strength. It has challenged our ministries across the government to look at our actions in three ways: stopping the spread of COVID-19; continuing to deliver our core programs and services; and safely reopening our economy and putting Ontario on the road to recovery.

At the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, this meant temporarily closing Ontario parks and conservation reserves in March. We did that in order to ensure physical distancing and to keep all staff and visitors safe. We have offered up our lab services to help with environmental testing while Public Health Ontario focuses on the immediate COVID-19-related public health needs. We have issued temporary emergency orders to ensure that the province's drinking water and waste water systems continue to operate and provide clean, safe drinking water to the public. At the same time, my ministry has continued to carry out our mandate—including the work of front-line staff to ensure compliance and conduct field research.

Today, I'll outline a series of proposed amendments to the Environmental Assessment Act that, if passed, will help facilitate Ontario's economic recovery while supporting strong environmental oversight.

It is key to this recovery that local infrastructure projects move forward quickly. Building roads, highways and bridges is important to our communities because they create jobs, ensure delivery of vital goods and services, and attract investment and other business opportunities. As a government, we always need to be working to ensure that our processes and programs are as efficient and effective as possible, free of unnecessary delays.

Unfortunately, even with the best-designed system, problems creep in. The Environmental Assessment Act is no exception, with well intentioned but often overlapping and cumbersome processes put in place over the decades. As a result, the act is in desperate need of modernization.

Environmental assessment is an important process that ensures that impacts to the environment are considered before building infrastructure in our communities. However, in the nearly 50 years since the Environmental Assessment Act was first introduced, our world has become more complex and so has the landscape on how to regulate decisions that may impact the environment. Now, more than ever, there's a need to improve our outdated environment assessment program so that it's faster, less duplicative of our planning processes, and efficient, allowing for taxpayer-funded resources to be calibrated to the anticipated environmental impact of a project.

The current process for comprehensive environmental assessments can be slow and ineffective. It can take up to six years for some projects, slowing down important infrastructure that Ontario communities run, like the installation of large electricity lines and expressways. That's why we've been proposing sensible, practical changes that would ensure strong environmental oversight while reducing delays on infrastructure projects that matter most to Ontario's communities.

Last year, our government made a commitment to update our program and ensure that it considers the input of municipalities, Indigenous communities and other stakeholders, while also allowing government and proponents to focus resources and shorten delays on projects that matter most to Ontario communities—all of this while maintaining Ontario's stringent environmental protections.

In April 2019, my ministry consulted on ideas for modernizing the Environmental Assessment Act, and we heard broad support for our proposal.

In June 2019, we took action, through the More Homes, More Choice Act, to improve timelines for streamlining processes by exempting low-impact projects. This included projects like snowplowing, constructing roadside parks and adding bike lanes. These are routine activities that have significant community benefit but little to no environmental impact.

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Mr. Speaker, I'd like to tell you now and the members of the House, the chamber, about a series of proposed

changes to the Environmental Assessment Act that are included in schedule 6 of Bill 197. We are now consulting on further practical solutions that will speed up projects, such as erosion remediation initiatives, and important upgrades to machinery, such as water power generators, so that communities of Ontario are safe and have what they need to serve their residents.

We'll be working with Indigenous communities, municipalities, industry, environmental organizations and other partners to find opportunities for government to work smarter so that infrastructure and other projects that are important to our communities are built without unnecessary delays. These consultation opportunities will happen at various stages as regulations are developed, giving Ontarians the opportunity to share their perspectives and help inform the modernized environmental assessment program.

Bill 197, along with updated regulations and guidance, will allow us to reduce the amount of time it takes to complete the comprehensive environmental assessment process by 50%, from six years down to three. This would be accomplished in a number of ways, including strict timelines for decisions, accountability for missed decision deadlines and a requirement that proponents carry out their studies in a reasonable time period. In addition, we will move to allow for online submission of environmental assessments, something that every other jurisdiction in Canada is doing, except Ontario. We will continue to pressure the federal government to defer to Ontario's process for projects that trigger both the federal and provincial environmental assessment requirements. And finally, we'll introduce a modern regulatory assessment framework that is streamlined, with consistent and standardized processes to replace class environmental assessments. These proposed changes will help communities bounce back from the COVID-19 outbreak by ensuring municipalities and businesses are equipped with the tools they need to get key infrastructure built faster, while maintaining strong environmental protections.

Building on the changes made through the More Homes, More Choice Act to exempt low-risk projects from environmental assessments, we worked with proponents to develop a series of changes to Ontario's eight class EAs to further streamline these requirements for the classes of activities that are both considered routine, with predictable and manageable impacts. These changes, which have been posted to the Environmental Registry for public comment, would exempt more low-impact and emergency projects. These types of projects would help keep Ontario communities safe and functioning smoothly. Nobody wins if they get held up by a process that adds time and cost without providing added environmental benefits.

I'd like to provide the members with some examples of the delays and added expenses under the current environmental assessment system that I've mentioned earlier. The first example is in Elgin county—I might know where that county is, Mr. Speaker—down in southwestern Ontario. They were forced and required to replace the Port Bruce

Bridge, which collapsed in 2018. They were quite lucky on that collapse, as 10 minutes earlier, a school bus had just gone over the bridge and safely was on its way. Then afterwards, the bridge, unfortunately, collapsed.

Following the collapse, the county, of course, had to put up a temporary bridge. The replacement for Port Bruce Bridge needed to be larger than the original structure—not that much larger, same spot—and would have cost around \$1.7 million. Because this bridge was going to be a little bit bigger than previously, it didn't fit under the current emergency provisions of the class environmental assessment, meaning that it involved another class environmental assessment. The process took over a year and cost the municipality, the county, approximately \$60,000 before the project was able to start.

Under our proposed changes, this would have been considered an emergency and the bridge would have been built faster, while still meeting environmental permitting requirements. Elgin county could have started the project a year earlier and saved \$60,000 of taxpayer dollars, and permitting the process would have still ensured strong environmental oversight.

I drive in that area, being part of my riding, and I can tell you, the delays it cost not only individual residents of the area to go around via the highway system—it's an extra 30 minutes—it also affected emergency services. They, too, had to go a roundabout way. So we had an extra year of putting lives in response to emergency services—at risk because of an environmental assessment which, under our changes, would have been deemed an emergency, as opposed to building a bridge a little bit bigger than what was there earlier.

Another example, Mr. Speaker, is the Ballantrae long-term water supply project in York region. York had to undertake a class environmental assessment to increase the capacity of the drinking water system by withdrawing more water from the municipal drinking water wells. The class environmental assessment took almost three years to complete. It was also subject to part II orders under two different circumstances, which caused additional delays. As a result, the class environmental assessment took three years to complete, at a cost of \$771,000. The Municipal Engineers Association is proposing an exemption from class environmental assessment requirements for the installation of new wells, deepening of existing wells or increasing the pumping capacity of existing wells at an existing municipal well site. Had these changes already been put in place when York region was making its plans, it could have saved three years and more than three quarters of a million dollars.

One more example: the construction of a new pedestrian and cycling crossing at Fort York Boulevard, under the Gardiner Expressway. This project was subject to the schedule C process of the municipal class environmental assessment process because the capital infrastructure cost was over \$2.4 million. The funny thing is, if it was under \$2.4 million, the same project would not have needed that assessment. This meant that an important project providing jobs and economic and social benefits to the community was held up for one year, at a cost of \$75,000. Under

the class environmental assessment changes being proposed by the Municipal Engineers Association, the construction of new underpasses or overpasses or bridges for pedestrian, cycling, recreational or agricultural use will be exempt. The rationale for the proposed exemption is that active transportation, such as walking or cycling, has minimal ongoing environmental impacts, and certainly much less than vehicles. The environmental impacts during construction would be managed by grading, drainage, erosion control and stormwater management plans, and the shoreline permits that are required from the conservation authority. If these changes had already been made, the city of Toronto would have gotten the work under way a year earlier without the \$75,000 expense, meaning that it would happen much sooner, and that pedestrians and cyclists would have more options for travelling within the city, improving their health, via non-polluting transportation methods.

We are also proposing changes to eliminate duplication and reduce delay for projects or activities related to Indigenous land claims settlements and other agreements with Indigenous communities dealing with land, projects within provincial parks and conservation reserves and select Ministry of Transportation projects. For example, construction on specific highways and roads could get started faster, easing congestion from traffic and helping people get to the places they need to go more easily. The proposed changes would exempt them from the requirements of the Environmental Assessment Act as there already are existing legislation or processes in place to provide the appropriate level of environmental oversight and consultation. In some cases, such as the GTA West project, the exemption would provide a new, streamlined environmental assessment process.

As part of the government's plan to build infrastructure projects faster, including transit and highways, the proposed changes would find efficiencies in the environmental assessment process to shorten timelines and eliminate duplication with other planning and approval processes, while ensuring that appropriate consultation occurs and that the protection of the environment remains a priority. As with class environmental assessment changes, the proposed exempting regulations have been posted on the Environmental Registry for public review.

Mr. Speaker, I want to bring to the members' attention the kinds of response we have received from stakeholders regarding our proposals to modernize Ontario's environmental assessment program. For example, Paul Norris of the Ontario Waterpower Association believes the modernized environmental assessment program will result in "real and positive benefits for communities and for the environment."

The president of the Ontario Home Builders' Association had this to say in welcoming the changes we are proposing: "The modernization of the environmental assessment program will improve service standards and reduce delays by recognizing other planning processes. Today's system is cumbersome and delays the building of critical infrastructure and delivering new housing supply

to communities across Ontario. The proposed amendments by the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks will streamline the process, reduce red tape and, most importantly, support job creation as part of the post-pandemic recovery.”

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Finally, Jan De Silva from the Toronto Region Board of Trade was encouraged by our proposals, saying, “As an ever-growing and expanding region, infrastructure projects are a vital part of enabling our communities to work and move around more efficiently. When these projects are held up, we all lose out.” That’s why “it is encouraging to see the province introduce these long-anticipated reforms to the environmental assessment process. The board has long called for these changes to get much-needed infrastructure projects completed more quickly at less cost, while still protecting the environment and allowing for essential input from the public.”

Mr. Speaker, I would now like to turn to the commitment we made in our Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan to give municipalities more say in landfill approvals. We recognize the importance of autonomy in local decision-making and agree that a landfill should only be located in communities that are a willing host.

That is why, as part of the amendments that we are proposing to the Environmental Assessment Act, we are proposing changes that would require applicants for new, large landfills to obtain municipal support from host and certain nearby adjacent municipalities as part of the approval process.

Neighbouring municipalities will need to be supportive of the new landfill within 3.5 kilometres of a proposed landfill property and have specified authorized residential uses within that area. Support would need to be provided from lower and single-tier municipalities.

The province would retain the authority to override the requirement for a landfill proponent to obtain municipal support—and I just want to note, it is important to retain that ability so that we can be prepared if there are circumstances that impact the proper disposal of waste or if the province’s landfill capacity is threatened, such as the closure of international borders to the shipment of Ontario waste or in the cases of natural disaster.

Mr. Speaker, this is a balanced approach that gives local municipalities input in decisions impacting their citizens, while providing more certainty for landfill applicants by ensuring there’s local support before their application for a new landfill is submitted to the ministry.

This government is committed to working with landfill opponents, municipalities, landfill proponents, First Nation communities and the public to make sure that the people of Ontario are consulted and engaged throughout the siting and operation of landfills, ensuring strong environmental oversight is maintained.

To date, we have heard from over 140 municipalities who have asked for the right to have a greater say in the siting and approval of landfills in their communities, and these changes that we’re proposing have been received well by stakeholders.

Ingersoll Mayor Ted Comiskey, who is part of the Demand the Right Coalition of Ontario Municipalities, has said that our proposed changes would create an even playing field for municipalities and waste management companies and ensure the decisions of impacted municipalities will be respected.

One final area I’d like to touch upon today is approvals for waste water and stormwater infrastructure. Our province is facing aging infrastructure and growing populations, putting pressure on municipalities to change or upgrade local infrastructure at an accelerated rate. Currently, municipalities and developers send my ministry about 700 applications for environmental compliance approvals per year for low-risk, routine updates or changes to municipal infrastructure. The work involved could be as simple as replacing a pipe. This pipe-by-pipe process is not working. It is cumbersome and adds fees, paperwork and unnecessary delay for communities without providing any added environmental protection.

That’s why we’re proposing a new approach: a single consolidated approval to municipalities for the entire sewage collection system and a single consolidated approval for their stormwater management system. Provided they meet the requirements of routine changes, such as alterations, extensions, enlargements or replacement projects, they could be preauthorized to begin construction without needing separate approvals for each and every project. The result is that new projects will break ground much quicker, and our towns and cities will get critical infrastructure projects that they need.

Mr. Speaker, the COVID-19 pandemic has touched everyone in the province, creating personal and financial hardship. However, Ontarians have risen to the challenge and supported each other through these unprecedented times. Our government will continue to take strong, decisive leadership as we move forward with our plan to reopen the province safely and get people back to work and reverse the serious impacts of the pandemic on Ontario businesses.

Now, more than ever, Ontarians need to know that their government is looking out for their health and safety and doing the necessary changes that need to be made to get the economy up and running in a safe and efficient manner that also protects the environment.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): It is now time for questions to the minister.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I do have questions for the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. I will admit, though, it’s distressing to know that in the province of Ontario the Minister of Environment, Conservation and Parks stands in this place and, I would argue, is arguing for damage to the environment—at least as we have learned from organizations like the Canadian Environmental Law Association, which has put together a preliminary breakdown of the bill, especially schedule 6. We have major recommendations that this government pull this schedule because of the damage. They’ve outlined it.

I would like to know from this minister what he has to say to people like the Canadian Environmental Law Association when they challenge this government and say that this is regressive, that this is unnecessary, that this is doing harm and that this is not protecting Ontarians.

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Thanks very much for that question.

To the member opposite: I've heard a few comments from the other side of the House saying that this is a bad bill, but I have yet to hear one item of criticism of what we're doing.

What we're doing is taking an act which is 50 years old—Mr. Speaker, there are certain members of our Legislature who weren't even born when this act came out. Pierre Elliott Trudeau was the Prime Minister of Canada when this act came out. The world has changed; so has our knowledge of the environment, and so has our knowledge of building infrastructure projects.

So the question to the member opposite is: What exactly do you have wrong with this piece of legislation? Because what it does is aligns our legislation with the federal government and other provinces. It gets us up to date and modernizes the act. What do you have wrong with this bill, specifically?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Mike Harris: Do you know what? If we're going to try this—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I now recognize the member from Kitchener–Conestoga.

Mr. Mike Harris: Well, thank you, Speaker. I was actually kind of intrigued if maybe we could do kind of a back and forth like that. I think I would like to hear what the member from Oshawa would have to say to the question from the minister.

My question for the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks: He talked quite a bit about the Environmental Assessment Act and different things that we're making some changes to there. When we talk about fish and wildlife, for example, in the province, which I know we both have a great affinity for—often there are projects that get stuck in these environmental assessments that are actually very beneficial to waterways and marshes. Sometimes when new highways are getting built, there are often underpasses or overpasses, for deer and moose, for example, to be able to cross. I wondered if maybe he would elaborate a little bit more on how these changes could help move some of those things forward in a more expedient manner.

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Thanks to the member opposite for that question. I think it's timely that you're asking a question with regard to angling. We're in the midst right now of free fishing for all Ontarians without an outdoors card, without a licence, for two weeks. It ends this coming weekend. I'm hoping people get the opportunity to go out and do their free fishing and enjoy the time out. We've been in our houses for months now, needing to get out in the environment, and one of the activities this government has brought forward, thanks to the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, John Yakabuski, and the PA,

Mike Harris—is the fact that people can now get outside and enjoy the outdoors and enjoy free fishing in the province. We have opened up all the parks in this province, and we've done it in a safe manner, giving people an opportunity to get out into the parks.

Specific to this bill, with the environmental assessment, we are now going to allow building and conservation reserves to repair erosion problems on their properties without having to go through an environmental assessment. Right now, that is happening, where they have to go years under an assessment in order to make those repairs to erosion. They can get right to work because we know they are taking care of the environment.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Further to our conversation, I do have some specifics I'm so excited to share. I have a 10-page document with a preliminary analysis of schedule 6 that I'm happy to send over to the minister. Specifically, as outlined by the Canadian Environmental Law Association, schedule 6 will:

“—remove the automatic application of the EA to public sector undertakings, and instead the provincial cabinet will have unfettered discretion to pass a new regulation that lists which projects are (or are not) subject to the act;

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“—rename individual EAs as ‘comprehensive’ EAs, but the environment minister will still be empowered to approve EA terms of reference that exclude, or ‘scope,’ key environmental planning matters ... from consideration in the EA process;

“—terminate the 10 currently approved class EAs, and replace them with as-yet unknown ‘streamlined’ regulatory requirements”—editorial steamroll—“and

“—significantly restrict the grounds upon which Ontario can request ‘bump-up’ or ‘elevation’ of contentious infrastructure projects from a streamlined EA to a comprehensive EA.”

You have 20 years of recommendations from stakeholders that you could have drawn from to make this a better process. Just scrapping it? Please justify. That's my question.

Hon. Jeff Yurek: What the member opposite said is completely, utterly false.

Mr. Speaker, I know they have not been in—

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I have a point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I would ask you to withdraw, please.

Hon. Jeff Yurek: I withdraw, Speaker.

I understand that the member opposite's party has not been in power for 20 years, but understanding how regulations get in this legislation—the cabinet does not have the power to go project by project. If this legislation is passed, we are going to go through the consultation process with municipalities, with stakeholders, with Indigenous communities. We are going to post those consultations with the proposed regulations. Those regulations are going to be consulted on EBR and brought back for changes. As

every other piece of legislation gets passed in this Legislature, as it has through the entire history of this Legislature—those regulations go to cabinet for final approval. What she is saying is obtuse. It is totally inappropriate to be spreading those types of questions in this Legislature because they're untrue.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Sit down, please. I will ask the minister to withdraw once again.

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Withdraw.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much.

Still have a point of order? Did we take care of that all right? Thank you.

Further questions? I recognize the member from—point of order.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I stood on a legitimate point of order. I appreciate that the member was asked to withdraw, but—

Interjection.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm not going to be disrespected in this space. My point of order was that I have the right to not be treated that way in this House, or called a liar twice.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. Further questions?

Miss Christina Maria Mitas: I'm loving it.

There is a current process for environmental assessments. If I listen to my esteemed colleague on the other side, there are a lot of people who are unhappy with the current system—as you've said, 20 years of feedback on this.

So why are we proposing significant environmental protection changes now, during COVID-19? As she has said, there has been feedback on this outdated system, I would say from my feedback from you.

Have we considered input from the public, from stakeholders, from Indigenous communities, and will there be opportunities for further feedback going forward?

Hon. Jeff Yurek: Thanks for the question.

Yes, we've been working on this piece of legislation for over a year and a half. We have brought out consultations with municipalities, stakeholders and Indigenous communities for the past year and a half. Last year, we implemented new legislation which made some changes in environmental assessments, and continued our environmental assessment consultations.

It has now culminated into this piece of legislation, which amends 50 years of this Environmental Assessment Act. This piece of legislation, if passed, is enabling us to move forward to change the regulations. Once this bill, if passed, receives royal assent, we will begin consultation again with municipalities, Indigenous communities and stakeholders as we align this legislation with Canada and other provinces within the country, as we bring it online and make it modernized so that people can actually do their work online instead of via paper. We will ensure that environmental protection is first and foremost throughout this entire process.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I would like to make it clear to Hansard and the folks at home that the words I have shared are directly pulled, and I am citing and quoting, from the Canadian Environmental Law Association. This particular piece was written by their counsel, Richard Lindgren. It's called "EA Is Not Red Tape: The Case Against Ontario Bill 197." I read directly from their submission, so if there's any untruth or any correction, take it up with them, perhaps.

Theresa McClenaghan, CELA's executive director and counsel, says, "For the most part, the proposed changes serve to speed up development at the expense of environmental protection and public participation rights." So is she also incorrect, Minister?

Hon. Jeff Yurek: There will be proper consultation with the public through the entire process as it's vetted out, through the creation of the regulations in this legislation, and I look forward to the member opposite's support in this legislation as we move to make Ontario's environmental assessments modernized.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It has been an interesting debate this afternoon.

I have to tell you, when the government came out with a bill called Bill 197, the COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act, I was genuinely interested, because, of course, I sit on SCOFEA, the finance and economic recovery special committee that has been set up by this government. We have been hearing from the culture, heritage and tourism sector. Our critic is now listening to municipalities. This will move on to infrastructure, and then, I think, finally, at the end of the summer, small and medium-sized businesses will get their opportunity to voice their concerns, some five and a half months into the pandemic. I was excited that the government is not going to, perhaps, wait five and a half months to act on an economic recovery plan, and so I read this piece of legislation with great interest. I was promptly disappointed, Mr. Speaker.

I heard the minister responsible for municipalities and the Minister of Transportation talk earlier at length about how they have been listening and taking action, and so I was wondering, who have they listened to? It's a legitimate question, because they certainly didn't listen to the education sector, a major sector which has been missed in Bill 197. They certainly were not listening to the child care sector. Early childhood educators have been trying to reach out to this government for months to talk about how we could actually transition back into an early learning and care strategy which supports the economy, keeps our youngest children in the province safe, and ensures that women, who play a major factor in strengthening the economy, could have equal opportunity to enter into the economy.

They certainly did not listen to First Nations, Métis and Inuit folks in this province. We had the great pleasure of actually listening to the Indigenous tourism committee

delegation who came to finance. It's a matter of public record that they came and they made a specific ask of the province, asking for \$2.5 million. They could prove that there would be almost 140 businesses benefiting from that, with a return on the economic recovery of \$330 million, and that's not contained in Bill 197.

Notably, the agriculture sector is also missing. I think we have to acknowledge that food security and the safety of that food security line is incredibly important and needs to be protected and needs to be supported. Unfortunately, that is not in Bill 197, either.

I find the narrative that the government has created very curious, because we hear the Premier of Ontario consistently hiding behind the Prime Minister—the Prime Minister who, it should be noted, is also running for cover on a regular basis these days, in between apologizing for ethical breaches. He consistently defers to the federal government, ignoring the roles and responsibilities that the provincial government has, and he in particular as the Premier of this province.

I think that businesses in this province are out of patience, Mr. Speaker, and they certainly are expecting Bill 197 to have more strength, to have more depth, to have a tangible strategy to strengthen businesses.

Prior to that, though, listening to the Minister of Transportation and how infrastructure and transit is now the new mecca for job growth and job creation—I do want to point out that this is a government that has an incredible credibility issue on this file. This, of course, is the government that sold the 407. That does not strengthen the economy, I can tell you. I personally went to Peterborough about four weeks ago. I took the 407 to visit my parents and to bring them a set for their backyard, and the return trip cost \$107 from Waterloo to Peterborough on the 407. That's a huge amount of money. It has a direct negative impact on businesses across this province.

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So the privatization of transit does not work for the people we are elected to serve—it never has, it never will—but this piece of legislation, of course, opens the door to it. I know that our critic on transit will address this later on.

This is also the government, you'll remember, that filled in the Eglinton subway when the former Premier, Mike Harris, was still here. So the credibility piece is real.

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: You remember that. I know the member from Kitchener–Conestoga remembers that well. Maybe he even had a little shovel.

The credibility issue on transit infrastructure is very current, as well, because just last year, this government stalled the Highway 7 project, the four-lane project, the promised project that was long-standing from Dalton McGuinty. When it started, I happened to be at the groundbreaking. In 2007, I ran for the provincial NDP, and I crashed the ribbon cutting and the shovel thing. So it's very personal for me. We are now 13 years past that point. Very little has happened, except \$120 million has been spent for expropriation.

This morning, there was a Zoom announcement. I, personally, as the member from Kitchener-Waterloo, and the member from Kitchener Centre, unfortunately, were not invited to that announcement. Usually, if it's good news, you should at least invite us; we would have to say something nice.

For us, it is really and truly Groundhog Day in Kitchener-Waterloo. We have seen multiple governments make this announcement multiple times. Now that the Premier of the province has declared that the election has started and he's on the campaign trail, this amounts to another election promise that I'm sure will be broken, because there was no funding attached to said announcement. It has not gone through Treasury Board. It is not contained in any budget. Procurement will be set for sometime in 2021. So the people of Kitchener-Waterloo, and Guelph for that matter—I was speaking to the Green Party member earlier. People are very cautious about this, because it was almost a year ago that there was a passing mention of Highway 7 in the Ministry of Transportation strategy, and there was a delay “due to cost overruns.” That was the language that was used by the Minister of Transportation less than one year ago. But this morning, there has been a re-announcement.

The other language that the Minister of Transportation used, which I also found interesting and I'm curious about, is “transit-oriented communities.” Our critic has spoken often about this. It is the language and it is the ideology that we should be building towards. A really good example of a transit-oriented community project would be the Hamilton LRT. The Hamilton LRT was also cancelled, and after some \$130 million in expropriation costs.

So this is a government that will say how important transit is, will speak to the value around the return on investment, but will also cancel those projects.

But now we are in a pandemic and they have seen the light, and now they are talking about transit-oriented communities and fast-tracking infrastructure projects, particularly highway construction. However, you cannot blame the people of this province for having legitimate concerns based on this track record.

When we see a piece of legislation like this, which is an omnibus piece of legislation—this is exactly the kind of legislation that the former PC members, who used to sit on this side, would rail against when the Liberals brought it forward. And yet, here we are.

The other problematic piece, on a high level—before I get into the voices of the businesses that came to committee, because they need to be respected, and this piece of legislation does not respect them—is the ministerial orders. The extensive—once again, this government reaching for additional powers through ministerial orders. The associate minister said they will only use them when needed. This is the same language and tone that we hear from the Premier when he says, “Just trust me.” Nobody trusts them.

So here we are. We have a huge issue around transparency.

Yesterday, we finished the debate on Bill 195. Even the member from Thornhill says, “Well, transparency in

government is really nice when it's possible"—"when it's possible."

These are disturbing trends that need to be articulated in this place, as is our responsibility to do so, and to be put on the record.

I will say that economic recovery is top of mind across the province. Earlier today, I mentioned that the Canadian Federation of Independent Business has done some research and surveyed members. They have found that 68% of businesses across this country have taken on massive amounts of debt, on average \$135,000 per business, for every SME—an estimation of up to \$117 billion. Businesses have paid the price for provincial governments and for federal governments asking them to play a role, which was the responsible thing to do, in closing down and protecting our population. The debt that they face right now is crippling. Some 24% have said that they are almost back to normal, which means that 75% of the businesses in this province are struggling to make ends meet.

The number one issue that we have heard at the economic development and finance committee goes back to commercial rent. For the life of me, Mr. Speaker, for a government that talks about how valuable businesses are, how much they understand business—to be moving into the fifth month and still be talking about the lack of leadership on a commercial rent subsidy is beyond me.

I brought, actually, Ctrl V—I asked a question on Monday of the Minister of Finance. Ctrl V is a virtual reality company. They've received mixed messages from the government around when and where they can open. In one jurisdiction up north, they were classified as a water park, an amusement park; in another jurisdiction, they were classified as a movie theatre. So they still don't even know what the state of affairs is, what the rules and the guidelines are for safely opening. They do know that they are \$60,000 in debt because their landlord refused to engage in CECRA. They refused to engage in CECRA for a number of reasons. You can't force them.

Even the provincial government, on the eviction ban, was as weak as it can be. It was tied to a failed federal plan, which was CECRA, which meant you had to prove that you had lost 70% of your income, and it was landlord-driven. Tenants' voices were completely removed from the equation. For a government to say they value business voices but then ignore those business voices is actually, right now, economically and fiscally irresponsible.

We have argued that there is a role for the province to play—it's in our Save Main Street strategy—whereby the province augments that program. So when you have a landlord who refuses to engage—and keep in mind that businesses like Ctrl V may be evicted at the end of August, because that's when the eviction ban ends. The province can and should play a role in securing those businesses. We have maintained consistently that the reason why the province should do that is because, when these businesses go out of business, when they no longer are viable, when they are bankrupt, our economic recovery becomes slower and it becomes stalled. So it's in our collective best interests as a province to make sure that these businesses can succeed.

I want to bring those voices—because I want to make sure that everyone who hasn't had the chance and the joy of being on this finance committee can hear first-hand from Beth Potter, who is from the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario. She asked—and this is from Hansard: We need an "enhanced provincial support for Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance, as many businesses will be operating at reduced capacity and will require protection from eviction."

Aaron Binder, from the Corktown Residents and Business Association, has said, "The Ontario government" should "work with the federal government to expand the \$40,000 interest-free loan into a completely forgivable grant for tourism and hospitality businesses."

Is any of this contained within Bill 197? No.

The call for rent relief and eviction support—there's a call here from Ontario tourism as well around that perhaps the government also understands the need for a rent freeze, because, unbelievably, in a pandemic, you have landlords who are trying to jack up the cost of rent.

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Also, Minto Schneider from Explore Waterloo says, and this is directly from Hansard: We need "direct financial aid and grants to the tourism hospitality industry; 80% of tourism businesses are reporting significant disruptions to cash flow and many are facing insurmountable debt levels. Our industry requires direct financial aid over debt-deferral measures."

This is the tourism industry. Earlier this morning, the minister encouraged us all to travel around Ontario and put on our masks and take pictures and support them. Do you know what kind of support businesses need? They need direct, commercial rent subsidy. And how the government can strike this committee, have all these businesses come in, have all of these businesses ask for this one thing to stabilize the economy and stabilize their business, and then blatantly ignore them, is astounding. The sense of frustration is huge.

There are a couple of other voices I definitely want to get on the—Art Sinclair from the chamber of commerce in Waterloo, as well. He says, "So we've gone through the 1st of April and the 1st of May and the 1st of June, and we're not at a point yet where any money is" going "out to any tenants right now. We're not at a point where this problem is being addressed."

Does Bill 197 address it? No, it does not. It defies all logic.

Ian McLean says, "The rent piece is part of the bigger picture, so that any of the business people you're talking to today actually have businesses for people to go back to work" for.

Christopher Hudspeth from the Church-Wellesley Village BIA says that the rent subsidy is needed: "Absolutely. We would like to see that be mandatory or rolled out in such a way that 75% of it is covered, regardless of whether the landlord wants the program or not." That's the key piece. That is the missing piece of provincial leadership that businesses have been begging for. If you have ever owned a small business—and I've been

involved in small businesses for many years—you cannot take on more and more debt. It is crippling.

Finally, Ottawa Tourism: Mr. Crockatt says, “I think our organization is definitely in favour of finding solutions that can keep businesses open. A subsidy, certainly, is one of those solutions to augment the federal rent program.”

So how can the government bring forward Bill 197, call it a COVID-19 recovery act, and then miss the major component that businesses need in the province of Ontario? It does beg the question: Who were you listening to?

Education: Yesterday, our education critic went to the washrooms here at the Legislature. Now, we have these no-touch faucets and the soap dispensers have soap in them. What a thing. You know what doesn’t? This doesn’t exist in our schools. You want to create good jobs? You want to make sure that kids can go back to school safely so that the economy can actually come back, from an equality perspective? Then, invest some money in our schools. We still can’t drink the water in this place, but that’s another story. You can’t drink the water in all of our schools in the province of Ontario, as well.

If you were looking to stimulate the economy, the hugest part is the child care piece—the hugest piece. Between child care and education, you are discounting 50% of the population, and that is women. Women only make 78% on the dollar, still, in the province of Ontario. They do the majority of caring for the younger people in their family and the older people in their family. Yet, you have ignored that. You’ve tinkered around the edges and put a nice title on a bill. I think it’s fiscally and economically irresponsible. It certainly is not the approach that we would take.

Given the fact the government has done this huge overreach around additional powers with Bill 195 and now ministerial orders, only “when needed,” this does not instill confidence in the province of Ontario. I know that members across the aisle have heard the same things that we have heard, and I’m sure, when they read through Bill 197, they were equally disturbed to see that financial support is still the missing component. Why the Premier is hiding behind Justin Trudeau in this time—and, listen, right now Justin Trudeau is also trying to hide—is beyond me.

I look forward to hearing some of the questions, because there are certainly parts of this act whereby—the government has decided that directors of education and supervisory officers no longer have to be qualified teachers.

Does this create more jobs? Does this strengthen the economy? Absolutely not. What a missed opportunity. We have a responsibility to support businesses; they supported us during this COVID-19.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): It’s time for questions. The member from Kitchener–Conestoga.

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you, Speaker. I like the way you say that.

I’ve said this before, and I’ll say it again: I do have a lot of respect for the member from Waterloo. She does bring up some good points.

I’m sorry that she wasn’t able to be on the Zoom call this morning when we were announcing timelines and funding commitments to the new Highway 7 between Kitchener and Guelph. She said if she was on the call that she wanted to say some really positive words about the project and the government, so I figured maybe I’d give her the opportunity to do that now.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I’ve been saying positive things since 2007, because the investment in that highway—if it actually happens, the return on investment, the economic value is certainly there. There’s also an important health and safety piece. You are missing some of the other transit options around—multi-modal transit between those two towns.

The problem is that nobody believes you’re going to do it. Nobody believes it, because there wasn’t any funding attached to the promise. But I’m going to continue to push to make sure that we have greater transit between a really economic engine, which is Kitchener–Waterloo–Cambridge, and Guelph. We need to make sure that that actually happens this time, and it is my job to be the pain that I can be in this House, in a very efficient manner.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member for Waterloo for your presentation.

I am also concerned about what is missing in this economic recovery bill. One thing I see that’s missing is a real plan, a fully funded plan, to get kids back to daycare and back to school, so parents can go back to work.

What are you hearing from parents in your riding about what they want this government to do?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much to the member from University–Rosedale.

Listen, I can’t be the only one that’s heard this—that desperate parents, who have been asked to be educators in their home, to be caretakers and to actually be employees, have no support around that situation. What I’m hearing from parents is that they want the government to put forward the proposal, a safety proposal, for five days a week, where students go back to school.

The only way that this can happen, however, is if you invest money. You need to create additional space. You need to make sure that safety protocols are in place. Our schools in the province of Ontario have an infrastructure deficit that is well documented by the group Fix Our Schools. Why not use this opportunity to invest in education? The return on investment for that will be huge.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions? I recognize the member from Scarborough Centre.

Miss Christina Maria Mitas: I will echo my colleague and say I love the way you say that.

I think there is so much to unpack here. I know you said you were promptly disappointed with Bill 197 and we’re doing nothing for child care, but I will argue that child care is returning to 90% of its former capacity. That’s allowing mothers, women that you expressed care for, to get back to work to earn for their families. It’s allowing young

children to gain a sense of normalcy again, which is so very important.

I'll say that this bill, Bill 197, does include pieces on education. In fact, schedule 5 is entitled the "Education Act." This includes that we're not going to be allowing elementary suspensions. So we're doing things to assist our children.

When you say we have no plan for getting back to school—we have three distinct plans for getting back to school, because we are listening. We're looking at the data, we're working with public health and we're going to make sure that our kids are safe before we roll out a plan.

And when we go to business—you said more strength and depth is needed to help businesses and you said more funding is needed, but then you called us fiscally irresponsible at the same time. So which is it?

Ms. Catherine Fife: There's a lot to unpack in that question, I can tell you.

First of all, you need to go back to the child care sector, because having the minister make an announcement—listen, you're very good at making announcements, but 90% viability in our child care centres is not possible if you don't fund the safety protocols.

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And fiscally responsible would be looking at business as an investment—so investing in rent subsidies, not as a bailout, but as an investment for those businesses, because they are family-owned. Everything that they have built, all their savings have been invested in these businesses, and without them, our economy will not recover.

Basically, you've highlighted the difference in ideology. Our proposal and our plan is pragmatic and is based on listening to actual businesses. Your plan is, "How can we get Ontario back on its feet in the cheapest manner possible?"

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Ms. Marit Stiles: I really did appreciate the member for Waterloo's comments. I agree with many of the comments she made. I share those concerns about this legislation.

I did want to ask if the member from Waterloo could share with us how businesses feel they're being impacted by the uncertainty around the reopening of schools and, frankly, the devastating failure of the government to support child care in this critical moment.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I think the best way to answer the member's question is to highlight the fact that Toronto Food Tours, the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario, Corktown, Explore Waterloo Region, chambers of commerce, the Church-Wellesley Village BIA and Ottawa Tourism all said, "Don't look at a commercial rent subsidy as a bailout. Look at it as an investment and a sign of confidence."

If the government had made this measure tangible, if it was part of Bill 197, those businesses could plan for the future. They could start to retool in the new normal, whatever that new normal looks like. What a missed opportunity.

Everything comes back to confidence in the economy. We need people to get back out there. Businesses need our support to ensure that the public understands that it is safe to go to a restaurant. That's a communication issue, but it also is funding for PPE.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: When COVID-19 had first occurred in this province, we put partisanship aside and worked together. We passed legislation to protect workers. We passed the economic update, which included supports for the health care sector, small businesses and social services. Now we're at that point where we're talking about getting the economy rolling again and really working together to help businesses thrive and many communities achieve equal opportunity. In this bill there is equal opportunity for our youth, for our education system.

My question to the member is, what would you say to our low-income individuals or members of the Indigenous community, to our Black youth—such as in Simcoe county; we're doing a lot of Black youth uplifting events—what would you say to them by voting against this bill that gives them that equal opportunity, that gives them the leg up, and finally brings diversity into our school system?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Wow. I have to say, I've never heard a stretch like that with regard to Bill 197. I don't even know where you pulled that out of because it's not in this bill.

What's not in this bill—there isn't a single change to safeguard long-term-care residents and our seniors. What would you say to your residents about that? This bill does not include a single dime for small and medium-sized businesses that are still struggling. It doesn't even add one more child care space. It doesn't increase the number of classrooms to make sure that there is an education strategy. It doesn't even include a cent for municipalities, which are facing billions of dollars of cuts. Actually, without strong municipalities, we don't have the services, we don't have our communities, and you've just left them out hanging, hiding behind Justin Trudeau.

I think that you should read Bill 197, because there's no way that you could ask me that question and have it relate to this piece of legislation.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Jim McDonell: Thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to speak. I heard the member talk about this bill not looking after additional schools, but we've already handled that. We were spending hundreds of millions of dollars on new schools before this pandemic ever started. So we knew there was an issue. We knew that the previous government had failed our students in education, and we took steps that would enable our students a path through their math. In grade 6 math, over half of them were not meeting standards. So I think we've done those things. I'm not sure if the member has new schools in her riding, but certainly I do in mine, and—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. Back to the member for Waterloo.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Having a nice school in a community isn't going to be of any value if you actually don't invest the money to make sure that students can go back there safely. Essentially, you're taking cover with the pandemic. It is borderline unethical.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to Bill 197, the COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act. You know in those ads that you see on TV sometimes—"Not actual size," or, "Not as advertised," or, "Product may be different when it arrives at your home." I'll get into this a bit later. I'm not going to be—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order, please.

Mr. John Fraser: I'm glad I woke you all up. It was a sleepy debate, and now we're going to get going.

I won't be supporting Bill 197, not because I don't support economic recovery; there are actually some things that I think that are good here that are necessary and important, but you've buried them in a phone book of things that I think require more thought, more debate—have other things attached to them. That's the problem with wanting us to get on the bus with the omnibus bill. You put things in here that don't work, things that aren't necessary, things that aren't in line with Ontarians' priorities.

In this economic recovery act, this Yellow Pages that we produced in the last couple of weeks—you call it the economic recovery act, but it has nothing to do with the single most important thing that this Legislature has to do for economic recovery, and that is getting our kids back into school full-time this fall. We need more educators, we need more spaces for children to learn, and more support for vulnerable learners so their classes can be safer and smaller. That's the thing that we need to do.

Right now, parents across Ontario, since the beginning of this pandemic and kids being out of school—actually, mostly moms have been carrying the freight for this challenge that's in front of us. It has been affecting their jobs, their income, their careers. It has kept them out of the workforce. The most important thing that we can do is not in this act. The most important thing is to get people fully participating in our economy and the workforce, and it's disappointing that that's not in this act.

I'll have to agree: There is one good thing in education, which is eliminating those suspensions. It's the right thing to do; a small thing, but an important thing to some families. But the only other piece on education is that boards of education can hire directors of education without teaching experience. I don't understand that as a priority—unless there's somebody who doesn't have teaching experience who wants to be a director of education that's lobbying for that right now. I don't know why we'd be doing that, why there's such urgency that we have to put it in this bill. There's no plan for students with special

needs who deal with the effects of COVID-19; no plan for families of children with autism.

Calling it the economic recovery act without really understanding that the cornerstone of our recovery is going to be based on getting people in the workforce—and to do that, we have to have a plan to invest in our schools.

Interruption.

Interjection: Time's up.

Mr. John Fraser: There we go. Am I done? There we go. Somebody just lost their phone. I just lost my train. I was on a roll.

We need more educators, more spaces for kids to learn; we need more support for students with special needs. That's the thing we need to be doing right now. We're not going to get to economic recovery if we can't do that.

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It's not just parents asking for that; it's businesses. Businesses are saying, "You need a plan for schools. You need a plan for child care." That's what we need so that we can open up, so people can begin to earn their full incomes and participate in the economy.

One of the things, when I look at this act, is that you're putting a name on the bill and there's a whole bunch of stuff that's in there that doesn't relate to economic recovery. I know that the Attorney General is going to be here later on—

Mr. Mike Harris: He's right there.

Mr. John Fraser: Oh, is he there? Oh, my God. Oh, he put his coat on. I didn't recognize him. He had a shirt last time I saw him.

I'm trying to understand the importance of changing how we nominate justices of the peace as it relates to economic recovery. I'll be looking forward to that. And maybe when he asks me a question he can explain why that is, because I'm not convinced that it's a priority and that it relates to our economic recovery. I don't think it fits the title.

The other things that are in this bill are around transportation and expropriations. That's a bit concerning—that it will be easier for governments to expropriate land without having to explain it. Taking away land—that's a pretty big right to be affecting.

Then, the things that are around environmental assessments and the powers that are given to the minister to decide whether or not a project gets an assessment—the ability to override current environmental laws. The interesting thing about environmental laws is that they go way back to Bill Davis. The reason we have the Niagara Escarpment and some of the environmental laws that we do is that Bill Davis understood that it was important to protect the environment. But apparently now that is changed, and we can change those rules and override those protections that we have, by the minister with no checks and balances. I don't think Ontarians expect that. I can't support this bill because of that.

The other thing I don't understand is that we've got all this stuff—188 pages or whatever it is—and we're in a rush to do it. We're only sitting three days a week. I don't know why we can't sit four, socially distanced. I know that

maybe not everybody is excited about that. But why aren't we here? Why aren't we here if we've got all of these things that need debate and thought and discussion?

This bill is not going to go to committee. If you were on this side and they were on the other side or we were on the other side and we said that it's not going to go to committee, you guys would go berserk. People would be setting their hair on fire.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Oh, yes. And you have hair to put on fire.

Mr. John Fraser: I know. There we go. I lined you up for that one, Gilles.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: You know something about that.

Mr. John Fraser: I do, yes.

It's not going to go to committee. Look at all the changes you have in there. I don't think, apart from the environmental stuff and the expropriations, that the intent is bad. I think you're in a hurry to do things that you probably shouldn't do in a hurry, that you should take the time to think about, take the time to put to committee. Speaking from experience, when we don't do those things, we don't get the best possible law.

I mentioned education as being top of mind for families. The other thing that I don't see in this bill, apart from the development charges—which I think is the ability of municipalities now to collect development charges for long-term care, which was something that existed in Ontario up until Mike Harris, and then we ended collecting development charges for health care. We stopped that. So it's a good thing it's back. I really think that's a good thing. The devil is in the details, but the money is going to municipalities and not-for-profit; I'm good with that.

But here is the question: While you were doing that, why are we still charging long-term-care development charges? So you want to build a long-term-care home? You're a church or not-for-profit? They can charge you development charges, and many municipalities do. Hospitals? Development charges. Why not make that change? When you're in a hurry, you don't say, "Oh, yes, we should be doing this as well too," right? If you want to incent building long-term care, it's a good thing, but you didn't go far enough.

But as far as long-term care goes—what's not in this bill is something that I think is on everybody's mind: What are we going to do to stabilize the workforce? We're quickly approaching, 15 days from now, August 1, the end of the pandemic pay. It's done. Is the government going to extend that? I don't know. How are they going to stabilize that workforce? They're going to have to continue that increase because you want to keep people from working in more than one home if we get a second wave, so we need to do that. That's not in this bill. The government's not talking about that, but that's really important.

What's also really important is that we have to deal with four-bed ward rooms. What are we going to do now that we know what happens in there? There has been no indication as to whether we're going to stop the practice of not sending residents of long-term care to hospitals—because that was happening during the pandemic, and we

can't do that if we don't have the right space in there. I think it's something that's not in this bill. I think that it's something that's important.

Some of the things I can support in this bill, if you had separated them out, are the things you have to do around municipalities and meetings, the things you have to do around the enforcement of fines and acts—the Marriage Act—it's good things. I'm not going to say, "Your intent is bad; everything you're doing is bad." What I'm saying is that you're throwing everything into the same basket and saying, "Here, you've got to take this." It's too much. It's too much stuff.

I'm not one for process, but from being here I've come to understand the need for it. It's not just a need on this side because people feel that we want to slow you down or obstruct or make sure that your plans don't come through. It's just that when we talk to each other, listen to each other and take the time, we actually find out things that we could do better, that we hadn't thought of—on both sides. I've heard explanations about that when I think something is a certain way, and a member on the other side will say, "Well, did you think about this?" You say, "Oh, my gosh." Yes.

This omnibus bill doesn't give a chance for us to listen to each other about a whole bunch of stuff. There are 20 different things in here—a whole bunch of stuff. What that means is we're not going to do the best that we can. We don't need to be perfect, but at least we need to take the time to listen to each other.

I don't know why, if we've got all these things to do, we are not sitting here longer. I know that's not a popular thing, but if we're going to do all these things, why don't we get it right?

Now, having said all those things, there is stuff in here I just won't stand for: the stuff around the environment, the stuff around evictions, all those things. I just don't think I could support that ever. I don't think there's an explanation by the minister that's going to convince me otherwise. I think some of that is in a hurry and it's going to have consequences for our environment and consequences for people.

We're also debating Bill 195. We've got kind of the same thing going on here, which is we're now changing—instead of really having the proper legislative oversight of this whole Legislature, on emergency powers, we're now going to give it to a very small group of people who meet once a month and then produce a report that we'll get some time later. And what we've done in emergency powers—and I'm sorry to go on about this, but I think I want to mention it again—is, we've taken away people's rights. There was a reason, and it was a good reason, and they said yes. But we took away their rights. We took the right of association. "Close your businesses." "Close your schools." We closed their places of worship. That bill is not going to go to committee. We're not going to give it the proper oversight. The same thing is going to happen here. We're not going to get the best bill that we can.

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During the course of this pandemic, definitely in all the emergency legislation, and actually almost all pieces of

legislation, we've had co-operation—not agreement, but co-operation—to get it done. With this bill and some other things that we're doing, that's ending. That trust that existed there seems to be ending, and we're going back to business as usual. That's why I say, why don't we just sit four days a week and do what we have to do?

That's all I'm going to say on Bill 197. I look forward to my colleagues' questions, and I appreciate their attention and good humour. I believe all of us are here to do the best thing that we can for Ontarians. The best thing we can do for Ontarians is listen to each other, and Bill 197 is not going to allow us to do that in the kind of way that this place demands.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Thank you to my colleague for his remarks on this bill. My colleague talked about schools and mentioned that there are certain things that—sorry, my mike is not on yet, so I have to speak—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Now it's on.

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Now it's on.

As a father of four kids, and three kids who are going to school right now, with the youngest who just graduated from SK, don't you think that I should know what the future is in terms of—based on the Chief Medical Officer of Health's advice looking at when we are making the decisions, or as a parent shouldn't I have the choice to make, whether it's online or in class, because—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much.

I'll return to the member for Ottawa South for your response.

Mr. John Fraser: You're right. Parents should have choices. But the vast majority of parents right now are saying, "Here's what we want you to do." And, actually, Ottawa's Medical Officer of Health has said, "Look, we need to get kids back to school five days a week and then we have to do what we need to do to make it safe." I'm sure that Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health—because there are other ones across the province that are saying the same thing—is going to say that.

Here's the bottom line: We have to spend more money on education—not forever, but we have to do it to make our classes smaller and safer, and then also ensure that, for parents who really don't feel confident about that, that they have an option as well. I agree with what you're saying. The point to the future is that's why we need to have a plan, and that's why it's disappointing that there isn't a plan right now.

Thanks very much for your question.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question to the member is a really simple one. As you know, we've just been handed a time allocation motion, both for Bill 195, which is the bill that gives the government the ability to do extension of emergency orders and amendments in cabinet and not here in the House, and Bill 197, the very bill you're debating.

There will be no committee. The public doesn't get their say. Are you surprised? Because I'm not.

Mr. John Fraser: Move in haste, repent in leisure. The public is not going to get their say. What that we do at committee—listen to them and then we talk on their behalf and say things that we heard from them, and we make the bills better. We make the laws better.

I'm going to say that I've been on the other side when I've seen that stuff happen—not to this extent, but when I've seen that happen. And when I see that, even when I was—we can't do that. I've been in committee where there's conflict but we have agreement. When there are three clauses that are exactly the same, the government is going to say, "We're going to vote for our clause." I've been there. That's wrong.

We have to go to committee. That's what committees are there for. It's not an inconvenience because we're in a hurry.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Miss Christina Maria Mitas: I do love the hair. I'll start off being nice.

On education, I know that we have not given the teachers' unions \$4 million, give or take, for their negotiating costs, aka renting rooms and having pizza parties, and I know we haven't given them another \$22 million in funds that don't need receipts or have no accountability and controls. I know we haven't done that. But I will agree with you that mothers have been carrying the freight in what has been going on in education. This is why we're doing our best to get children back to school and back in child care spaces. We've increased capacity back to 90% over what it was previously.

Regarding director of education jobs: This is a tool to get the best, most qualified candidates into these positions, because there are many people who have master's degrees and PhDs in education but happen not to hold a BEd as well. So, really, my question to the member opposite is: What do you have against qualified candidates having a shot at getting into the position, so we have the most qualified person in there who will do the best thing for the areas of education that they're in? And what do you have against not suspending students in elementary school?

Mr. John Fraser: I think I said at the outset that I thought that was a good thing and that I thought that putting in the piece on directors of education was puzzling to me—why that's a priority right now, and why we can't talk about it a bit more. I don't necessarily disagree; I just want to know why.

I come from a business background. When I was running a business, the way I approached it was that I had to have the ability to understand what every person who worked for me did. Maybe I've done that—maybe not forever, but I have done it and understood what was happening and what they were doing. I think that's a critical piece. That's what I believe.

I'd like the time to debate that fully, not just get my 20 minutes here and then run off and skip committee and time-allocate it. Maybe you're right, but you haven't made

an argument and convinced me yet. You just threw this bill out here.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: Literally every expert I know who deals with equity in education is appalled and disgusted by this change that they are slipping into this bill.

My question for the member from Ottawa South is: Why do you think they're slipping it into a bill with no proper debate and no proper consultation?

Mr. John Fraser: The member has a point. When you call something the "economic recovery act" and then you put a whole bunch of stuff in there that doesn't relate to economic recovery, and then you time-allocate it and you don't send it to committee, I think it's reasonable for people to say, "Why are they doing it that way?" I think it's reasonable. We need to take the time to debate these things—not forever, but not not-at-all. And that's what's happening—all this stuff to unpack in here. It's like a phone book.

As I said, there are some things in this bill that I think are important and are necessary, and there's a whole bunch of stuff that's not. You can't stick it all together and say, "Vote for it." It doesn't work that way.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

Ms. Christine Hogarth: Thank you to the member opposite for their comments.

This Bill 197 is about economic recovery. We talk about strengthening communities, building housing, building transit, and building highways and transit faster. All those things are creating jobs, which is all part of our economic recovery.

I'd like to know why the Liberals are against creating jobs.

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Mr. John Fraser: I'm not against creating jobs; I am against protections on things like expropriations and overriding environmental concerns.

You know how we can create jobs? Get people back to work. You know how we can get people back to work and back into the workforce? We can go and make sure that kids return to school full-time this fall. That's the most important thing we can do—not just for families, but for our economic recovery. That's the point that I'm trying to make. That's the most important thing for economic recovery, and it's nowhere to be seen in the economic recovery act.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: I was lucky enough to have a forum with youth about recovery from COVID-19, with a panel of brilliant young people who were wanting to share their ideas about what they hoped would come from all the difficulties under COVID-19. They had three pillars. They wanted a society where there was an anti-racism lens, so that people weren't disproportionately affected in future. They wanted the environment to be a

key piece to economic recovery, that we would do things differently.

My question is, what do you think of those pillars?

Mr. John Fraser: I think those are good pillars. They're coming from kids that have been affected by this. I know that many of us have children here—not just young children, but teenagers, young adults. It's been very difficult for them. They see the inequities in society. That's the greatest thing about COVID-19. It's a great revealer. And 2020 is an interesting year for this to happen in. So I agree with them.

I want to thank all my colleagues for being so good-humoured and making a Wednesday afternoon a bit more enjoyable.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate? I recognize the Attorney General.

Hon. Doug Downey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know you miss saying "Barrie–Springwater–Oro–Medonte."

I just want to echo something that my colleague across the way just said, that this pressure of COVID-19 really does reveal things. I'm going to talk about some of the things they've revealed and how we're fixing them.

I'm glad to stand here in the House today to add my voice to the second reading of the COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act, 2020. COVID-19 has had a tragic and unprecedented impact across our province in some sectors. As the threat emerged, our government took swift and decisive action to protect Ontarians and limit the spread of the deadly virus. As a result of Ontario's comprehensive response and the commitment of heroes on the front lines of this emergency, we've begun to recover as a province.

I have to say, this morning's numbers—102, so we are on the path to recovery. Everybody's doing hard work and doing the right things. Businesses are putting Ontarians back to work, people are safely returning with loved ones, and communities are finding new ways to come together again.

The outstanding co-operation and innovation that has brought our province to this point in its recovery has also been central to the response of Ontario's justice system to the ongoing threat of COVID-19. Over the past four months, our justice system, our justice partners, including Ontario's three courts of justice, Chief Justice Strathy, Chief Justice Morawetz and Chief Justice Maisonneuve—all providing great leadership in these trying times—and the hundreds of front-line staff across the province have worked tirelessly to keep people safe while delivering access to critical justice services. It has not been easy, but people have worked hard, and we are delivering great success.

This required tremendous and unprecedented change. The COVID-19 outbreak pushed us. It pushed our justice partners. We had to accelerate our plans for modernization, plans that we started when we first got elected. We have to rethink how justice can be done in Ontario. We're not just automating the system; we're transforming the system, and we're doing it in real time with the co-operation of our justice partners. We had to address issues that have held back the justice system for decades, absolute decades.

I like to say we modernized the system 25 years in 25 days, and we're still going. Our government is committed to modernization in the justice system since we began our mandate. The COVID-19 outbreak challenged us to accomplish more than we could ever have imagined, in a shorter a period of time. I'm so proud of the work we've accomplished here in Ontario. Our justice system is moving forward, and we're still moving at light speed. We were successful in implementing changes that many previously thought would take years to complete, if possible at all.

I have no intention of slowing down, Mr. Speaker. We're not reverting back to the old way of doing things. It was not working; it was broken. We are doing things in a different way. We're moving forward. We're going to continue to work with our partners. We'll continue to move services online. We'll continue to establish new and innovative ways of delivering justice remotely when Ontarians can benefit. As Ontario starts down the path to renewal, economic recovery and growth, we're continuing to press forward boldly towards a more accessible, a more responsive and a more resilient system for those who are dealing with the justice system in Ontario.

Before I forget, Mr. Speaker, I should have started off by saying that I'm splitting my time with the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction.

I'll now talk about the first piece of this bill, which I'm very proud of. We're focusing on moving the system forward. It's an overly complex, paper-based justice system that no one—no one—thinks is accessible and fit for the 21st century. It has allowed the critical justice services, as we change, to continue through the outbreak.

The changes proposed in this act would continue to support a more accessible and resilient justice system by amending the Provincial Offences Act so that municipally administered courts can make greater use of technology to deliver justice services remotely and reduce in-person court appearances. I'm just going to let that sit there for a moment, Mr. Speaker. We're using technology to let people access their systems. It doesn't sound very complicated, and I don't know why it wasn't done before, but as the member opposite mentioned, it really brought into sharp focus some of the fissures in our system. COVID-19 has brought this forward, and we're responding immediately, and we're very proud to do it.

The provincial offences courts are the busiest in Ontario's justice system—the absolute busiest. Provincial offences include things—we know about speeding, traffic violations, municipal bylaw infractions, excessive noise as a bylaw, all sorts of things. That's why they're the busiest courts. I don't know if anybody—I won't ask you, Mr. Speaker, if you yourself have been in a provincial offences court recently. You're shaking your head no, so that's good news. But boy, they're busy. They're really busy. I encourage people—if you want to see your system in action, if you want your children to see the system in action, when we get them fully open, have them go down to a courthouse; have them go down to the municipal offices and see it in action.

As we move forward, we do have to do it in a different way. It's not going to be the way that it was before. We have to protect public health and safety. Provincial offences matters originally scheduled between March 16 and September 11 have been adjourned and rescheduled to a later date. We need to deal with the capacity that has been adjourned down the road, and that's exactly what we're doing.

We're supporting the 59 municipal partners who administer court operations for the Provincial Offences Act. We're making key changes to allow the provincial offences courts to hear more matters virtually. What does that mean? Well, some of the key proposed amendments are—we're going to remove the requirement for the defendant to attend court in person to meet with a prosecutor to try to reach an early resolution or plea agreement, or to request a trial to fight a ticket. We're going to destream that. We're opening the door to these. We're not making it have to be that way, but we're showing a better way, and our municipal partners are very eager for this.

We're allowing any participant, including a judge or a justice of the peace, to attend any proceeding remotely by audio or video unless a judicial official orders otherwise. Again, we're creating more options. We're harnessing current technology, Mr. Speaker. We're allowing the judiciary to order in-person attendance where defendants or other participants have difficulty participating remotely or where the interests of justice or a fair trial require it.

And we're permitting officers to seek search warrants remotely in all cases. Again, I want to stop for a moment and talk about the impact of that. Allowing an officer to seek a remote search warrant is significant in terms of cost savings. This equally could have been in a red tape reduction bill, but it's here because we need the tools now to make this happen, to keep people safe and make the system move forward. Some police detachments have two warrant officers who, quite frankly, drive hours to get search warrants. We're going to facilitate this electronically. It's a phenomenal step forward, Mr. Speaker.

This will allow provincial offences courts to resume operations sooner, while accommodating physical distancing as Ontario starts its recovery from COVID-19. Our POA justice partners have joined us in acknowledging that we must continue to press forward boldly toward a more accessible, responsive and resilient system that will continue to evolve long after the pandemic is over.

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We've appreciated the input of the justice and municipal partners to advance this proposal, and I was pleased to hear that the president of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, Jamie McGarvey, endorsed the proposed reforms: "Changes that safeguard access to justice and improve efficiency in enforcement and administration make sense. Allowing remote proceedings in municipal courts is a timely" first "step in modernizing justice for Ontarians."

I want to touch on one other item in my time, Mr. Speaker. Our government and our justice partners are working quickly to make the changes necessary to adapt

and modernize and provide critical essential justice services that people rely on. In addition to making it easier to access justice services remotely across the system, we're proposing changes to make the system work better for law-abiding Ontarians by filling the justice of the peace vacancies faster across our province.

To strengthen the administration, our proposed changes would maintain the integrity of the appointments system while promoting greater diversity and regional representation. The current process to fill justice of the peace vacancies is outdated, it's slow and it's very paper-based—hundreds of thousands of pieces of paper. It has created obstacles for filling vacancies. It has resulted in delays for people getting their day in court. Now more than ever, we need to make these changes to improve efficiency.

To help the courts best serve Ontarians, we're proposing changes that would maintain the high integrity of the current appointment process for justices of the peace and ensure the mandatory qualifications set out in legislation are still there. They won't change. That's not being changed; it's just the process. The proposed changes will allow myself or any Attorney General to recommend additional selection criteria for consideration by the appointments committee, the JPAAC.

The proposed changes will also promote diversity by requiring the committee to publish statistics on the diversity characteristics of applicants at every stage of the recruitment process. This is very important to me. I want to know who is applying. I want to know who is getting interviews. I want to know who is getting recommended. It's self-selecting, but we can't change the system if we don't know what's happening in it. So the collection of these statistics, self-disclosed, will show up on the annual report. That is a public document. We will see if we are encouraging diversity to come to the JP bench, and if we're not, then we can take steps to fix it, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud of that part of this bill.

We'll also modernize the appointments process by allowing the committee to hold meetings and interviews electronically, as we're doing with court hearings and others. We're also going to move the applications to a digital process, saving hundreds of thousands of pieces of paper. It will make the process more accessible. It will get rid of paper. It will make it more open. It will track diversity.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very excited about our ability to move the system forward and have some goodness come out of all of the sacrifice people have made during COVID-19.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Now, since you had mentioned that you were sharing your time—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Yes, he did.

I turn it over to the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction, the member from Brampton South.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Before I start my remarks, I need to take the opportunity to really acknowledge the great work

of the Attorney General. Through this pandemic, we have seen the legal system transformed digitally in a way I don't think anybody could have imagined, and under the leadership of the Attorney General. I think he deserves our praise for all of the great work that he has been doing to keep that very important element of our justice system operational. So thank you for doing that, Attorney General.

I'm really happy to be able to speak to this piece of legislation. I think it's one of the most important pieces of legislation that we're bringing forward. I look forward to seeing all of the members of this House support this piece of legislation, because it is going to be very helpful in making sure that we get this province moving and back on its feet. It's about job creation. It's about getting people back to work. It's about building transit. It's about ensuring we modernize our regulations.

I really want to start by contextualizing this. Our government has taken decisive action to support job creators any time that we can, and especially at a time when we've been going through a global pandemic.

In the very short term, we've introduced temporary regulation changes to better support businesses, to better support those struggling through the pandemic, a couple of those being enabling trucks to deliver supplies 24/7 to areas across this province, and allowing bars and restaurants to include alcohol with takeout or delivery food items. These have all been very helpful to those businesses. But there's a lot of work to be done, and we want to be there to support. I think this piece of legislation is an important pillar to moving that forward and getting this province back on its feet.

We're going to be laying the foundation for companies to rebound and rehire, creating opportunities in every corner of this province. We're going to make regulations smarter. We're going to make them easier to comply with, so companies can invest their time and money in keeping their employees and customers safe, rebuilding their businesses and creating jobs.

As we make these changes, we are going to be committed to not compromising on our commitment to protect public health, safety and the environment. We know that Ontario families expect and deserve clean air and water, and they expect and deserve safe products and working conditions. Regulations are there to ensure that these are met. But we also must ensure that we don't require businesses to spend time and money complying with unnecessary burdens that go well beyond what's needed to achieve the goals of those regulations. That's why we're making regulations smarter for people and better for business. We're making them effective, targeted and focused while maintaining standards to keep people safe and healthy.

Now I want to take the members through the several proposals in the COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act that would reduce burdens on businesses and job creators in this province.

The first proposal would merge two guiding pieces of legislation on red tape reduction so every burden reduction requirement would be within a single piece of legislation.

The Modernizing Ontario for People and Businesses Act would make the rules that require the government to consider the impact of proposed policy changes on regulatory burdens clear and easier to understand. It would also expand the scope of this requirement to encompass regulations, legislation, policies and forms. And it would expand this requirement for not just the for-profit sector, but also for the not-for-profit sector or the broader public sector.

As well, the new act will enshrine in law seven regulatory modernization principles that guide Ontario's work to reduce regulatory burdens. These principles are: using industry standards or international standard best practices; applying a small business lens to legislation; going digital; strengthening risk-based inspections; creating a tell-us-once culture; focusing on the user; and developing regulations that target outcomes that you want to achieve. Embedding these principles in the act would require the government to consider them whenever it amends regulations, legislation, forms or policies.

The next proposal I'd like to outline will support strong environmental oversight and a strong economy while proposing sensible and practical changes to Ontario's environmental assessment program, which is almost 50 years old. These changes would focus more of our oversight resources where they should be: on projects that would have the greatest impact on the environment. We would also streamline the environmental assessment process for low-impact projects, such as installing traffic lights, flood-proofing shorelines and upgrading municipal wells for drinking water. These changes would match the level of assessment requirements with the environmental impact. They would also ensure that assessments don't unnecessarily delay projects that are vital to communities, such as installing electricity infrastructure.

Currently, a comprehensive environmental assessment can take up to six years to complete. We would make these reviews more efficient by improving coordination across government with existing planning processes, policies and oversight and by removing redundant and time-consuming requirements. This would cut the average time in half for the largest infrastructure projects in this province. Our proposal would complete the reviews in up to three years instead of the current six-year process, and that would allow critical projects to get off the ground without undue delay.

Next, I want to walk through what could be another very important project for many municipal infrastructure projects, and that is streamlining the Drainage Act. This would help speed up approvals and reduce costs for farmers and rural municipalities. Projects to improve municipal drains are crucial for rural communities. They can make farming more competitive by increasing crop productivity, and they can also reduce soil erosion and nutrient loss while helping with flood control. But farmers and municipal leaders have told us that regulatory approvals are too costly and too time-consuming because there are too many steps and agencies involved in the process. We're going to be proposing a new, streamlined

approach that will help with approval times while maintaining all environmental protections.

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The next proposal that I really want to highlight is a game-changer, and I believe it is going to be an incredible resource for this province, and that's transit-oriented communities. This is going to be the pillar for four subway projects across the GTA. Connecting more homes and jobs to transit would increase ridership, reduce traffic congestion and create great, new places to live, work and play. It would also give the economy a boost that would support the recovery we are talking about. This proposal would allow the government to assemble the land needed to attract competitive bids for projects to create transit-oriented communities in a timely and efficient way. It would also let us enter into commercial arrangements to help create integrated, complete communities and offset the cost of building these stations.

Lastly, I want to touch upon another proposal that I think would really help make building infrastructure much easier. Highway construction projects keep people and goods moving and create jobs that put people back to work. In the vast majority of cases, the government acquires the land needed for highway projects through negotiation. In a few cases, property owners request a hearing of necessity about a proposed expropriation. They usually waive this request before the hearing day, but by their initial request they may have delayed the project by up to a year. We're proposing establishing an alternative process that would give property owners several opportunities to voice their concerns during the design, environmental assessment and public consultation process, but without delaying the projects.

Mr. Speaker, I've just gone into a couple of the proposals that we have put forward in this piece of legislation that would help get this economy back to where it was before. We needed to highlight some of the important measures that we're using through a regulatory lens to get our economy moving again. The pandemic has reinforced the need to take stronger action to make regulations better for people and smarter for business, and that's exactly what we are doing: We are modernizing outdated regulations, removing duplication and minimizing costly red tape, and we're empowering businesses to focus on what's most important: rebuilding, rehiring and re-emerging stronger than ever before.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions?

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: Speaker, I would like to ask, through you, the same question to the Attorney General that I asked to the member from Ottawa South. Literally every expert I know who works on equity in education is appalled at the change that this legislation is proposing to make with regard to the qualifications of a director of education. Every person who is an expert in equity in education—

Interjections.

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: The fact that the members are trying to speak over me doesn't change the fact that they are appalled at this change. This is not a partisan issue; it is an education and an equity issue.

My question is: Why would the government push ahead with a change that is so concerning, without an opportunity to hear the objections from these experts themselves?

Hon. Doug Downey: I'm pleased to address this question.

I was talking to the CEO of my hospital recently, who is not a surgeon, and I was talking to the head of a law firm the other day, who is not a lawyer, so I'm not quite sure why—I'm not even sure how that got in the act, to be honest, because to be a director of education, you have to have been a superintendent, and to be a superintendent, you have to have been an in-class teacher. I'm not sure who decided when—I should go back and look, actually; maybe it was the NDP under Premier Rae who said that we should have teachers run the entire school system. Mr. Speaker, if somebody who's a former teacher is the most qualified, that makes total sense to me.

But let's talk about equity and inclusion. Let's talk about what's in the bill in terms of tracking who becomes a justice of the peace. I hope she asks me another question, so I can talk about the great work we're doing in diversity in appointments of justices of the peace.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Deepak Anand: Mr. Speaker, it is hard to imagine that in the 21st century, where achieving efficiencies through digital presence is the new norm, that we are still using an outdated justice system. I had visited a Brampton court with the Attorney General and the rest of my Peel MPPs, and I still remember how busy it was.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the Attorney General, what is your message to the residents of Peel and the rest of Ontario on updating the outdated justice system—and by the way, if there are any costs, will municipalities receive additional funding for these changes?

Hon. Doug Downey: I'm really pleased to answer that question. We did a great tour of the Brampton courthouse. I've been there a couple of times now. It's the busiest courthouse in Canada. It's really quite incredible.

What I would like to tell the residents of Peel is that we are doing justice differently. We are doing it so that it's more accessible and we are doing it so that it's going to be faster. We're going to unclog the system by using technology. It's really quite incredible. The municipalities with the POA stuff are very excited, because it's going to allow us to take costs out of the system.

While we're taking costs out of the system, we're also investing. We announced—I think it was last week—\$150 million more into the expansion of broadband and Internet service for areas that are underserved, to have that installed. We're trying to do two things at once: We're increasing capacity by putting technology in place, and we're taking out complexity to make the system move faster. It's really, a very exciting time, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: I want to thank, first of all, the members from Brampton South and from Barrie–Springwater–Oro–Medonte.

Mrs. Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens: The bill is named the COVID-19 recovery act, so I'm puzzled that the name implies and claims that it addresses COVID-19 recovery and yet does not fix even simple cross-partisan issues, like ensuring air conditioning is in all nursing homes and long-term-care homes. Instead, those real issues are discussed and detailed, mind you, in press conferences outside of this room, like the one announcement that was made today.

Mr. Speaker, because my residents in St. Catharines won't have a chance to speak at committee or ask the questions and they elected me to ask questions—they would like to do it, but they won't be able to—I'd like to ask the member, why do all the good-sounding announcements about COVID-19 recovery only happen in news conferences or not at all, and not often enough in the assembly, in legislation called—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much.

Over to the Attorney General for a response.

Hon. Doug Downey: There is so much good stuff in here; it's really hard to give it enough airtime. There is just so much. It bursts beyond this space.

But it's hard to find a balance, because the member from Ottawa South stood up just moments ago and said, "There's too much stuff in here."

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Too much good stuff.

Hon. Doug Downey: And there's good stuff in here. "But there's too much stuff." And now I'm hearing, "There's not enough stuff in here. We need more stuff. I'm hearing good stuff, but it's not all in here."

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: You have to balance.

Hon. Doug Downey: Mr. Speaker, we're trying to find the balance to get Ontario back on the recovery that it needs. We've got so many different tools, crossing so many different sectors in here—everything from education to the justice system to red tape. We really found a nice balance to move the province forward and make sure that Ontario stays on the positive track that we are on as we come out of this.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mrs. Nina Tangri: During COVID-19, businesses have suffered significantly. Now more than ever, it's critical to position Ontario as a top-tier destination for investment. We all know that COVID-19 has had a significant impact on our economy, but many jurisdictions around the world have similar investment-attraction organizations, and we need to be able to compete and promote Ontario. Attracting domestic and foreign investment is the anchor to bringing good jobs to the province. They need to recover quickly and safely from COVID-19, which makes attracting more investment critical.

Can the member please tell us a little bit more about Invest Ontario?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I'll refer to the Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction.

Hon. Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria: This is probably one of the key pillars of this piece of legislation. It's going to

be a game-changer for the province of Ontario in attracting businesses right here in this province. Now, more than ever, we need to make sure that we are securing the jobs of the future. We need to ensure that we take and use every resource possible to ensure that the future generations of this province have access to good-paying jobs, that they have access to jobs across this province. One way we're going to do that is by setting up Invest Ontario.

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The member from Mississauga–Streetsville has been an incredible supporter of the life sciences industry. We need to drive more of that investment right here in the province. How are we going to do that? We're going to be doing that by making sure we have all of the resources in place, we have all of the supports in place, because we're competing not only against other provinces; we're competing against states south of the border. Whether it's Michigan or Ohio—they've got agencies opened up that are poaching good-quality Canadian jobs right here from the province, and we want to put a stop to that. That's exactly what we will do by supporting Invest Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Michael Mantha: My question will be to the Attorney General. We've spoken in the past about a big issue that I was expecting to be in Bill 197, the COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act. I've spoken to the member in regard to the challenges that the Manitoulin Island COVID-19 Leadership Coordination Committee has brought to this government through a letter dated June 18, which has still gone unanswered. So I'm taking this opportunity to talk about that.

The implementation of emergency preparedness measures, supportive care centres and isolation centres all costs money, and this funding is not coming down to their hospitals. This is putting a hardship and burden on these hospitals.

My question to the member is this: Along with those hardships, insurance companies are now telling these hospitals that your implementation centres, your preparedness centres, your supportive care—there are amendments that are being done to the Insurance Act—exclusions that are being done. We need help. I was hoping to see this in the economic recovery act. If we don't have the hospitals—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. I return to the Attorney General for a final response.

Hon. Doug Downey: This is a very important area. We have spoken about it, and I've heard from others about it as well. What we're talking about is liability—because the insurance companies, I'm being told by the member opposite, are excluding certain kinds of liability to maintain coverage or are increasing the cost of coverage. This is a challenge for businesses and for the MUSH sector. It's a real challenge. Now, if we turn the dial on liability, if we make it a little more difficult to sue, then maybe the insurance companies won't be doing those exclusions.

Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to have the conversation about how that affects the entire sector, including areas

that the NDP have been standing up and saying that we shouldn't be touching. So—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you very much. Further debate?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Today, I am one of the lucky people who gets to rise and speak on Bill 197, the economic recovery act. Why I say I'm one of the lucky ones is because we've just recently heard that this bill is not going to go to committee—this large, omnibus bill that talks about how we are going to recover from COVID-19 is not going to committee. That means that people in Ontario do not have the opportunity to express their viewpoints directly to members and ministers about how they think this bill should be improved: what they like about it; what they've got concerns about; how this affects their daily lives, their businesses, their institutions, their communities—gone.

The same can also be said for Bill 195, the bill that allows you to keep all the state-of-emergency powers that you want, essentially indefinitely, and you're no longer requiring yourselves to have that necessary check and balance and go back to the Legislature to get those states of emergency extended. That is also not going to committee. I think that is a shame. It is a shame because we are a democratic province, and going to committee is one thing that should be critical to any kind of democratic process to create laws that affect the 10 million people who live in Ontario.

I'm also concerned because the COVID-19 economic recovery bill doesn't include the many things that should be in a recovery bill. This pandemic that we're experiencing is on the level of World War II, of the Spanish flu, of the Great Depression. It is serious, it is sustained, and it's having a significant negative impact on people's lives and the economy. There is a lot that the Ontario government can do to lift people up and help them get through this pandemic, but I don't see this in this bill.

Help for renters: My riding is 50% renters. Toronto is 50% renters, and there is nothing in this bill that is going to help the people in this city who are having difficulty paying rent because, through no fault of their own, they've lost their job because businesses have done the right thing and listened to the Ontario government and shut down. They couldn't just open up again. So there are a lot of people who simply don't have a job right now, and there's nothing to help renters pay their rent.

There is nothing in this legislation to significantly help Main Street—small businesses. In my riding, we have many Main Street operations: Dundas Street, Ossington, College Street, Bloor Street, Bay Street, Yorkville, many areas that have a thriving downtown—a lot of small businesses that support the local community. Now, when I walk down these streets, what I see is empty storefronts and for-lease signs because these businesses are going under. They cannot pay their rent. They cannot afford to continue to function. They want to keep their businesses. I've heard from so many small businesses who have said, "I've put my life into this business. I don't want to go under, but I can't keep paying \$15,000 a month rent

because I'm maybe making 5% or 10%, or sometimes 0%, of the income I used to make." There is nothing in this economic recovery bill that is helping those small businesses.

There is nothing significant here to help long-term-care homes, homes in which we have seen over 1,000 people die. In my riding, University–Rosedale, we had some homes, such as the Mon Sheong retirement home, where 35% of the people in that home died. They didn't just die from COVID-19; some of them died from dehydration because there weren't enough people on the floor to get to them in time to provide the necessary medication, food and water to keep them going. There is nothing significant in Bill 197 that would help us tackle these ongoing chronic issues that face our long-term-care-home sector, such as the fact that there are very wealthy people that want to make even more money providing homes and care to people who are elderly. What should be in here is a measure to make long-term-care homes public or non-profit so we can address these systemic issues that have been exacerbated by COVID-19.

There's also nothing in this bill to safely open up schools and daycares. As a working parent of two small children in a riding where there are many parents, I walk down the street and I hear daily from parents who are telling me, "I cannot do this anymore"—mainly women. "I cannot do this anymore. I cannot continue to attempt to work full-time and look after kids full-time. I need a break. I need help." They are looking at this government to move forward with properly investing in child care so it is safe and so parents have a place to put their kids, knowing that it is going to be safe, so that they can go back to work, because their employers are being told that they can now start to reopen. But how can that happen if their employees have kids at home? It doesn't add up.

Then there's also the issue with schools. If this was going to be a real economic recovery plan, then there needs to be a real commitment not just to have your three options and delegate it all to the school boards to decide, but to actually fund these options so that they are real options. When I look at the Ontario government's plan, I see no money for HVAC systems so that there's proper ventilation in these schools; I see no money in here to make sure that every kid has access to a washroom and a sink that works so they can wash their hands; I see no money in here to hire educators so that we can keep the student-teacher ratio low so we can reduce the spread of COVID-19 but also get kids back to learning. I see none of that. I see no measures here to ensure that parents who can't make it work have some kind of sick leave so that if they have to stay home and look after their kids for a variety of reasons, they're not going to have to sell their home or be evicted because they can't pay their mortgage payments or the rent payments anymore.

Most importantly—this would basically be free for you—there's no guarantee, if a parent needs to stay at home, that an employer has to give them their job back at the end. So they're going to stay at home, and then they might have to lose their job because they have to take a

leave of absence. You could change that with Ontario's labour laws. That's real economic recovery. I don't see this in this legislation.

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What I also don't see is any kind of commitment to have a vision, which would mean investing in a green new deal, so that we could move forward with a stimulus program to create green jobs in this sector, transform our transportation sector so that we can have real low-carbon transit and properly retrofit our buildings so that we can truly tackle climate change. What COVID-19 has taught all of us is that (a) a crisis can come at any time, and (b) when the crisis hits, it's very difficult for us to scramble and respond. If you think COVID-19 is a crisis, wait until the worst impacts of climate change hit, because that will make COVID-19 feel tiny in comparison. I don't see that here.

I want to address what is not in the bill, but also what is in the bill. I want to use the remaining part of my time to focus on two pieces of the bill. There's a lot, but I only have 20 minutes.

The first piece is the Transit-Oriented Communities Act legislation, which the Minister of Transportation and the Associate Minister of Transportation talked up as one of the ways that we can bring about a true economic recovery and really get congestion moving in this region. This is essentially what this bill does: It assigns a huge amount of power to cabinet to seize and develop private land near the government's four priority transit projects, so that they can be built. What it also does is that it gives Ontario the power to strip the hearing of necessity from an expropriation process for any land they want that they choose to classify as transit-oriented community land.

But what's important to note when you read the bill is that they can classify any land they want as transit-oriented community land. So they can go anywhere they like, quickly expropriate private land and link it to these four priority transit projects, which is very different from what the minister said earlier about how this would only apply to development that's directly connected to or above a station. No, no, no. That is not what the legislation says.

The second piece that is interesting about this act is that it gives the minister new planning powers. What the minister has now, through a minister's zoning order, is you can exempt yourself from municipal planning rules. But with this new bill, you can also apply new zoning requirements to this land. The Minister of Transportation and the associate minister have talked a good game about how this could mean affordable housing and inclusionary zoning. Yes, it could, but there is nothing in the bill that indicates that at all. All it says is that you have additional powers to do what you want. So you could move forward with inclusionary zoning. You could have done it in the last two years, but you haven't. You could, but you haven't yet. You could move forward with affordable housing requirements. You could, but you haven't yet. For any kind of market-oriented development you've moved forward with a station so far—you haven't yet. So I must say that I'm a little bit skeptical about what this actually

means, because the bill says something very different from what I'm hearing the minister and the associate minister talk about.

I also have two additional concerns about what this developer-first approach to transit means. The first concern I have is that the math doesn't really add up. The reason why I say that is that if you're going to get developers to fund transit stations, they're not going to do it for free. They need to make a 15% to 20% profit, which is what they typically make on any new development, and then they need to pay for the cost of the transit station itself. In the case of a station along the Scarborough subway, you're talking about a lot of money: \$500 million. That's very different from a GO station, at about \$100 million. That's a lot of money.

So 15% to 20% profit, and then the money for the station—how much development would that actually mean? Some market experts calculated that out, and this was back in 2019. They said that in order to build one subway stop, you would need to build 10 million to 17 million square feet of new unit space in order to justify the cost of a new transit station. What that actually means in real terms is that you would need to build eight to 13 of Canada's highest condo developments—78-story condo developments—next to a station to convince a developer to also cover the cost of the station itself. I don't know if you've talked to folks along Scarborough or along the relief line and you said to them, "Okay, all of you are going to get between eight and 13 78-story condos, and we're going to expropriate all your private land near there in order to justify the cost of that station."

Then there are all the additional costs of having all those people move in. Who is going to pay for all those additional services, like schools, like parks, like daycares? Probably the municipality. The reason why I bring that up is because the numbers don't add up, and the problem with moving forward on a transit project where the numbers don't add up is that it could mean that we are left with very little.

This has been attempted by the Fords before. We had a situation where the former mayor, Rob Ford, attempted to get transit built using the development sector, with his dream of building the Sheppard subway. It never happened. We also had the former mayor attempt to build the Scarborough subway extension, with the goal of convincing developers to fund the project in return for securing air rights and development rights. It never happened.

Now we're in a situation where the Ontario government wants to move forward with building GO stations using developer money as well. In this case, it's a little bit complicated. You've had a few stations: You've built one at Woodbine Entertainment casino—you got them to build a station so that more people will come to their entertainment complex—and then you've also got Mimico to do a renovation at Mimico station.

The problem with this approach is that it puts developers first and it means the public interest is second. When we actually look at all the stations that should be built in the GTHA, we find that the ones that are developer-

friendly get moved forward, and then the other ones that truly benefit the public interest, that Metrolinx has said will actually increase ridership, are currently languishing right now, like the St. Clair West station or like the extension to Kitchener-Waterloo.

This approach of having developers choose where stations are being built and having them funded actually means that we get a lot less transit, and it's not necessarily the best way for the public to get around or for us to reduce congestion. So I have a lot of concerns. You are essentially gambling the future of our transit system on a volatile real estate market and developers who are in it for themselves.

The second piece of the bill that I want to address is the changes to the Environmental Assessment Act. What's so concerning about these changes to the environmental assessment process is that you've turned the environmental assessment process on its head. Where before it was a requirement to the vast majority of projects that an environmental assessment process is done—you work out what could be the impact of this project on human health, on water quality, on wildlife, on development, on transit, on the local municipality; you work that all out and you do public consultation as well—what's happening now is you've moved to a process where the vast majority of projects are exempt and then you get to apply the environmental assessment process as you see fit. That is very, very disturbing.

Many organizations have also identified why this is so concerning. The example that I'd like to bring up is Grassy Narrows. The reason why I bring that up is because the Ontario government has decided to wholesale exempt the forestry industry from the environmental assessment process—the whole industry, essentially. Why that is important to the community of Grassy Narrows is that a large chunk of Grassy Narrows land has been subject to logging and this Ontario government is still interested in logging on sections of Grassy Narrows territory again.

The problem with that is that if you did a proper environmental assessment process and you looked at the science, you would find that when you clear-cut log an area, it actually leaches more mercury into the waterways. That's what happens. There's mercury embedded into the soil. When you log, there are less roots supporting that soil and it increases the amount of mercury in the waterways. That's something that you would find if you did an environmental assessment process.

What that means is that Grassy Narrows, this community that has been subject to the legacy of toxic mercury poisoning for over 40 years because of a corporate industrial decision by Reed to release that mercury into the waterway—for 40 years they have been subject to toxic poisoning, poisoning that continues to this day.

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When they do tests on newborn babies in Grassy Narrows right now, there are higher levels of mercury in their young bodies than there are in the general population. That's a tragedy, because that leads to earlier death, increased risk of heart disease, Alzheimer's and a low quality of living. It's a tragedy.

Why I bring that up is because that is the whole purpose of an environmental assessment process. You do that assessment before you approve an industrial project or a logging approval or a new landfill—you do that environmental assessment process so that you reduce harm on the general population. It's a warning call.

I encourage you to go back and return the environmental assessment process back into this legislation because it shouldn't be removed. It's very disturbing.

There are elements of the bill that also raise additional concerns for me. They were the two main ones, the transit and the environmental assessment process, but there are a few others. One is the decision by this government to change who qualifies, who is a director of education—so that they don't have to be a former teacher. What is concerning to me about that is it opens the door for more partisan appointments of directors of education. When I look at the United States and I see their head of education, Betsy DeVos, and the controversy that follows her with her ideological commitment to charter schools and privatized schools, I get worried. It's very concerning that you would want to remove that requirement. There are plenty of qualified people who have been former teachers who would do an excellent job in those positions, so I question why you are doing that.

The second thing I'm concerned about is the changes to the Payday Loans Act. I'm under the impression that there is some improvement to the rules concerning how much people can lend desperate people and how much interest they have to pay in return. But when you do the calculations, you will also see that this still allows these payday lenders to make up to a 316% profit from people who are struggling. That's a concern, because I don't think we should have businesses profiting off people like that—on interest. They're not doing anything for it; it's interest. These are my concerns.

I want to summarize by saying that I think it is fundamentally wrong to have an omnibus bill like this, tackling a subject as important as economic recovery from COVID-19, pass through this Legislature with just six and a half hours' debate and then two hours' debate at third reading. That is not an appropriate way to deal with something as complicated and as important as this.

I encourage you to move forward and at least allow the public to speak to such an important bill because we should recover right and it should be something that all of Ontario gets a say on.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions?

Mr. Jim McDonnell: I have a question for the member opposite. In my former role as mayor of the township of South Glengarry, we had a landfill site we were trying to extend the life of. We hired a consultant who had just gotten through another municipality's approval. We thought it would cost a few hundred thousand dollars. It took us almost 10 years and \$5 million to go through the EA process, to finally get the approval we asked for on day one.

That's the problem with the EA process: Every time we would get back with the required study—which was all

they wanted—there'd be a change in the Ministry of the Environment, a new person would be in there and he would want another study. It just went on and on and the dollars racked up. That's the problem.

I guess my question would be, how do you believe that that is good for the province and that changing those rules is not essential for opening up our economy?

Ms. Jessica Bell: I can't speak to the issues in your community because I don't know them very well. What I can say is that the whole point of an environmental assessment process is to do that balance, to work out, "Okay, we're going to move forward on this project. How much is it going to help and how much is it going to hurt? Is it going to hurt human health? Is it going to hurt nearby wildlife? Is it going to hurt the environment?" They are reasonable questions to ask.

Another issue that is very important is that these changes to the environmental assessment process are being put in a massive omnibus bill where we're just getting to debate it for 6.5 hours and no committee. If we're going to change a bill as important as the environmental assessment process, then we should at least allow the public to have a conversation about it, because everyone's opinion matters—not just yours, but other people's opinions matter as well.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Ms. Rima Berns-McGown: Over and over and over again, we've heard how this pandemic has exposed inequities and disparities in our society. I don't see anything in this bill that starts to fix those, but that is literally what everybody has been asking for. What would you suggest would be the way to go, if you were putting together a COVID-19 recovery bill?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member for Beaches—East York for that very important question.

I think that there are many ways that we can tackle racial inequities and class inequities in Ontario, and use economic recovery from COVID-19 as a way to do that. The two that come to mind include offering real rent relief and an expansion of the ban on evictions so that people who are renters—people who are on the whole poorer than people who are homeowners—get some kind of stability, especially people who have, through no fault of their own, lost their job in the last four months.

The second piece is around having a real, fully funded, very well-thought-out and safe plan to return kids to school and child care, so single parents and women, racialized women, people who are essential workers can have their kids learn and also have enough food to put on the table because they're working. Those are my two examples.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Kaleed Rasheed: Thank you to my colleague for her remarks.

Mr. Speaker, I want to mention something here which is very important: This bill is actually part of the consultation that SCOFEA, the Standing Committee on

Finance and Economic Affairs—we have had an enormous amount of hours that we have spent in that committee hearing from different businesses out there. Right now my colleagues are still in committee hearing from businesses the ideas on how we can come out of this COVID-19 crisis stronger than ever before—the business ideas, the job ideas.

The question to the member opposite is: When she says that this bill is something that was just brought forward without even hearing from businesses—I just want to ask her, what does she have to say about all of these hearings that have been happening for the last weeks, a good amount of weeks?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you for your question.

I am following the committee hearings that are happening around COVID-19 recovery. What concerns me is that many of these hearings have not yet happened. We have heard from the tourism sector, which is important to my riding of University–Rosedale. We have heard from the heritage sector. But what we haven't heard from is municipalities. The municipal hearings can—

Interjection.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Yes. Yes, they continue, and there are still multiple days to go. The city of Toronto, for instance—John Tory is saying that he doesn't know what he's going to do and what he's going to have to cut. Then we still need to hear from small and medium-sized businesses and infrastructure.

So my question to you is, why are we putting this bill and ramming it through in the middle of a pandemic when we haven't heard from industry, from multiple sectors, around how we should recover?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Mr. Michael Mantha: To the member from University–Rosedale, who provided a great overview of the topics that she covered: You would think that Bill 197, with a title like COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act, would include some of the Save Main Street COVID-19 pandemic plan that our leader and our party have been proposing.

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These are some of the challenges that we're fighting. A lot of the legislative ideas that are coming forward are one-sided.

My question to you is, for small businesses, if we were to assist them—particularly small business and medium-sized businesses, charities, community-based organizations. Commercial rent subsidies: Would that help? A utility payment freeze: Would that help? Remote-work funds for small businesses from home; an auto insurance grace period: Would that help? Would child care help? Would a plan to get kids back into school in September help?

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you for that excellent question. The examples that you're giving on how we could recover the economy are examples that I'm hearing my residents in University–Rosedale ask for. I've had many small businesses contact me saying that they cannot pay the rent

anymore but they want to continue to function. From Kensington to Yorkville to the Annex to Bloor Street, they want commercial rent subsidies. They want an expansion on who is temporarily unable to be evicted so that they can continue to have a hope of opening up their business again. They're very important factors.

The second piece you raise around ensuring that we have a safe plan to get kids back to school—a safe, funded plan to get kids back to school—is really critical to allowing kids to learn and also allowing parents to get back to work.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions?

Ms. Christine Hogarth: I'm actually going to address schedule 20 the transit-oriented communities section. Part of the objectives of the transit-oriented communities is increasing transit ridership and reducing transit congestion—and we've talked about climate change and we've talked about increasing housing supply, including affordable housing, which we all know is needed, especially in the city of Toronto. This is all part of this legislation.

I'm just wondering what the member opposite thinks of increasing housing supply, including affordable housing. Why would you be opposed to that? That is part of this bill.

Ms. Jessica Bell: Thank you to the member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore for that question. When I read this bill, is what I see is the Ontario government giving themselves the power to exempt themselves from municipal planning laws and to impose their own zoning requirements as they see fit, but there is no firm commitment in this legislation to mandate inclusionary zoning or affordable housing in any of these transit projects.

What I think is especially concerning is that when we look at this Ontario government's track record over the last two years, I do not see a firm commitment to building affordable housing near transit projects. We have the Woodbine Entertainment Group, which is building a GO station near their own casino—where are the affordable housing requirements in that? Or the Mimico GO station that is being built in your riding—where are the affordable housing requirements in that?

You made a secret deal. This Ontario government made a secret deal with Vandyk, the developer. You still will not publicly release that deal to us. And from everything I know about it, there are no firm affordable housing requirements to that. So there is a lot of talk that I'm hearing from this Ontario government, but your track record says something very different.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I rise to speak on Bill 197. As a member of the committee that's looking at economic recovery—as the member from Mississauga East–Cooksville just recommended or talked about—I was excited to look at a bill called the COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act. But, much to my disappointment, the bill doesn't talk about the real concerns that people and businesses have brought to the committee. Bill 197 is more

of a pre-pandemic wish list from the government than it is an economic recovery bill. Like most of the government's COVID-19 economic response bills, what's more important to talk about is what's not in this bill as what's in the bill—with one exception, which I will get to soon, Speaker.

This bill does nothing for the small businesses that have come to committee over and over again, asking for a rent relief program that actually works. I just got off of a call with the Downtown Guelph Business Association, and small businesses are still asking for a rent relief program that is driven by tenants, not landlords, and that has an economic threshold of a 20% loss instead of a 70% loss. Without this support, many small businesses will close.

In addition to that, these same small businesses are asking the government—and they asked at committee, the committee the member opposite referenced—for the commercial eviction ban to be extended at least until the end of the year, because it expires at the end of August even though many businesses are just now being able to reopen. There will be no economic recovery in Ontario if we allow small businesses to die. That's why the government must act, and unfortunately it's not in this bill.

There will be no economic recovery in Ontario if we don't come to the rescue of municipalities now. At one time, the city of Toronto was losing about \$65 million a week. Municipalities have hit a cash flow wall. While the Premier likes to blame Ottawa for the lack of action, we need action right now.

What I want to challenge the government to do—while they're negotiating a deal with the federal government, there are things this government could do right now. They can double the gas tax for municipalities, which is something they promised when they were campaigning in 2018. They can reverse the cuts to child care and public health by restoring the previous funding formulas. They can help municipalities and long-term care by offering them an immediate grant to cover the \$350 million of extra money municipalities put into city-run long-term care facilities.

Actually, while we're talking about long-term care, if the government really wanted to be prepared for a possible second wave as we deal with the economic recovery, they could make immediate investments in long-term care to provide the dignity that our elders deserve. While I support a public inquiry, I actually agree with the Premier that there are immediate steps that we can take, such as hiring more registered nurses, hiring more personal support workers and bringing in a minimum standard of care of four hours in our long-term-care facilities.

Businesses have come to committee, and they've told me in my own local consultations about economic recovery that there will be no economic recovery if parents have to choose between their jobs and their children. So until we have funding for child care facilities to open, for schools to be open full-time, providing in-class learning—until we have the funding to be able to do that, there will be no economic recovery.

While I appreciate the member opposite talking about the economic recovery committee, I would encourage the

government to listen to what the people and businesses are asking for at that committee and incorporate that into a bill that's about economic recovery.

Speaker, my time is limited, so I'm going to talk about one aspect of this bill that is particularly concerning and deeply disturbing. I've kind of gotten used to it, but whenever the government introduces a big omnibus bill, it seems like there's always a schedule in there that takes the hammer to environmental protection laws. Over and over again, we've seen it with this government: Whether it's laws to protect endangered species and their habitats, whether it's law to protect our drinking water from pits and quarries, whether it's laws to protect us from toxic spills into our lakes and rivers, the government considers it red tape. They consider it red tape.

Here again, we have changes to the Environmental Assessment Act in the name of cutting red tape. The laws that protect our drinking water, that protect our farmland, that protect the places we love in this province are not red tape. It is deeply concerning that this government is moving the environmental assessment process from a process where public projects receive an environmental assessment to one where the minister has the power to decide which projects will receive an EA and which will not. That shouldn't be decided by the minister. That should be decided by the threat of a project, the scale and scope of a project, and, most of all, by science. It should be decided by science.

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Do we really want to put that kind of power in the hands of the minister, and particularly this minister? There's no better example of that—from the court ruling we had just this last fall, where this minister cancelled a wind farm and said it was for a particular—actually, I think it was in your riding there, the member opposite. And the court—

Interjection.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: It was because of bats. And the courts ruled—and I want to quote. The courts ruled that the minister didn't follow science. The decision the minister made lacked “transparency and intelligibility.” Do we really want that kind of power in the hands of the minister?

The minister says that we need to speed up the EA process.

Interjection.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: The Minister of the Environment.

According to Ecojustice, the changes made in this bill actually may slow down the EA process, because now citizens, instead of going through the EA process—if the minister makes a bad decision or there was a bad proposal, they will take it to the courts, which will likely slow down the process further.

I'm all for modernizing the environmental assessment process and system, so let's modernize it for some things like what the Auditor General called for. In the Auditor General's 2016 report, they said that an EA shouldn't just apply to public projects; it should apply to private projects. That would have prevented the \$1.2-billion liability this province faces due to abandoned mines. Or maybe we

could apply it to greenhouse gas emissions and climate pollution. Or maybe we should modernize it to take into account more Indigenous issues.

I want to remind the members opposite that it was Bill Davis who brought in the Environmental Assessment Act, at a time when Conservatives actually recognized the importance of conserving the places we love, not treating it as red tape.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): It's time for questions.

Miss Christina Maria Mitas: Thank you to the member for bringing up Bill Davis, a great Conservative guy.

I'm going to start by reiterating that changing the requirements for education directors in this bill allows us to fill these positions with the most qualified individual for each respective position. It has been repeatedly insinuated by the member opposite for Beaches–East York that people are disgusted by this change. I'm going to firmly challenge her very misleading statements—repeatedly, I will add. But I don't think that I need to do this. Dr. Carol Campbell, a professor at OISE—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I'm sorry, I'm going to interrupt the member for Scarborough Centre and ask her to withdraw her unparliamentary comment.

Miss Christina Maria Mitas: Withdraw. I don't know what it was, but—

Interjection: “Misleading.”

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The way you do it is to just say, “I withdraw.”

Miss Christina Maria Mitas: I withdraw.

Dr. Carol Campbell, a professor at OISE in leadership and educational change, a world-renowned scholar, a strong, respected woman, who is not a Conservative, by any stretch of the imagination—OISE here, people—she has asked people for their views on her Twitter page: 15,000 followers. She said, “It's an issue that comes up and varies internationally.” Responses vary. Many people say that boards are large organizations, and you need people with varying levels of expertise in different areas.

I'll ask the member opposite: Don't you think that—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the question.

Yes, we should have the best-qualified person as the director of education, and they should have the qualifications of a teacher, so that they can actually understand how to do the job. I'm actually a little frightened, Speaker, by the nature of the question, because it sounds as if they're basing their decisions on a poll on Twitter. I'm sorry, but I would not base any government decision on a poll from Twitter. So let's continue to hire education directors who actually have teaching qualifications.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Questions?

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: I'd like to thank the member from Guelph for his comments. I liked how you were calling for an immediate investment in long-term care. We see in this omnibus bill this huge rush to push through this

massive piece of legislation without ever having the voice of Ontarians speak to it through committee.

Why do you think there is no mention of long-term-care improvements in this omnibus bill, and what does that say to you?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member's question.

I'm deeply concerned, given the huge tragedy we've seen in long-term care, that it's not addressed in a COVID-19 economic recovery bill—the reason being that most health care experts say that we will have a second wave. We have to be prepared for that second wave, and one of the ways we have to be prepared is to have proper investments in our long-term-care homes.

We know there have been numerous studies that have shown what needs to happen. We need more registered nurses, we need more personal support workers and we need a minimum standard of care of four hours in our long-term-care homes. That will require investments. Those are the kinds of investments that should be part of economic recovery from COVID-19.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The next question will be from the member from Ottawa West–Nepean.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I appreciate the remarks from the member from Guelph. I apologize for coming in a little bit late during your speech.

I know the member for Guelph and I share a commitment to public transit and making sure that public transit is an essential piece of our plan forward to create jobs, spur economic growth and also, of course, support the environment. So I was curious if the member for Guelph could comment on the provisions in the bill that talked about developing the Transit-Oriented Communities Program, and whether or not he thought that this was an important part of our government's vision.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I appreciate the member's questions.

Absolutely, transit is vital to economic recovery. It's one of the reasons I'm concerned about some of the changes that the government wants to propose to the environmental assessment. In particular, there seems to be a strong emphasis on building a new 400-series highway through the GTA west corridor. Instead of prioritizing something like that and skipping steps through the environmental assessment process, I would encourage the government to focus on and prioritize transit. That's where the money needs to go—a focus on transit, moving people through public transit.

If we're going to do things that expand highways, then let's do it in a way that electrifies our transportation system. If you want to talk about a great way of doing economic recovery, we should be having charging stations all over Ontario so we can become a global leader in manufacturing electric vehicles.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The next question will be from the member for Davenport.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I appreciated the comments from the member from Guelph with regard to this legislation, which

I think we share some of the same concerns about, particularly the lack of transparency and accountability here in the whole process, in the limiting and complete eradication of any public opportunities for input and debate.

I did want to provide another opportunity for you to expand a little bit more perhaps on how this government went wrong in terms of their unilateral actions to cancel all those wind farm contracts.

Mr. Mike Schreiner: First of all, the cancellation of renewable energy projects is subjecting this province to reputational risk. We've had chambers of commerce both in Canada and the United States raise concerns about whether that will produce a conducive environment for investment—when a government doesn't honour contracts.

You might ask, "Well, what's the relevancy to a COVID-19 recovery bill?" It's because one of the ways we need to recover from this is to attract global investment. The fastest-growing sector of the global economy is in clean technology, driven primarily by renewables, battery storage and electric vehicles. So if we want to talk about how we can recover from COVID-19 and lead the world in job creation, it's by investing in clean technologies like renewable energy, which this government cut.

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The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Barrie-Innisfil.

Ms. Andrea Khanjin: I was listening to the speech by the member opposite, and I know he shares an interest in the water-taking permit consultations, as do you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to remind him to tell his constituents that that's open until October 2. Of course, with the moratorium originally on water-taking—and I know you're very supportive of that, so I thank you.

When it comes to assessments, there are two parts of the bill, in terms of basing it all on the costs of the project. A lot of projects got away without environmental assessment because it was based on cost, and so they were very detrimental to the environment, but no environmental assessment was necessary because it didn't meet the cost threshold. So shouldn't we base it on the severity of the project as opposed to the cost?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I think we should base environmental assessments on science, first and foremost, then on threat. If you think about it, one of the reasons the Environmental Assessment Act was brought in was that it was one of these—you see these signs like, "Call before you dig" or "Look before you leap." That's what the environmental assessment is about—making sure we take a precautionary approach. And so the decision around an EA should not be arbitrarily placed in the hands of a minister. It should be based on science. There should be objective criteria.

Since the member brought up water-taking, which is one of my favourite subjects—if the government is so happy about their new regulations for permits to take water, instead of just focusing it really narrowly on new water bottling permits, let's focus it on all water-taking permits. Let's apply those regulations to pits and quarries

and existing industrial activity so we can really protect our water.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Scarborough Southwest with a quick question.

Ms. Doly Begum: I want to thank the member for his speech, and ask him particularly about schedule 6, the Environmental Assessment Act, of this bill. There are a lot of experts who have called it "regressive" and "unnecessary." What are your thoughts on how it's going to hurt this province?

Mr. Mike Schreiner: I'll give you a quote, actually, from one of the leading lawyers on environmental issues, Richard Lindgren, from the Canadian Environmental Law Association. I'll just read it here: "Instead of requiring assessments for public sector projects by default"—private sector projects, he acknowledges, are exempt, which I think is a problem with the act; and he goes on to say—"as the regime is currently set up, the changes" in Bill 197 "would mean projects only need a full assessment if designated by the minister." This is a big rollback of environmental protections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and answers for this round. Further debate?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to be back in the House today to participate in the debate on Bill 197. I'm happy to speak today to outline some of the ways our government is working to make life easier for Ontarians from one end of this province to the other.

Nothing is more important than protecting the health and well-being of Ontarians. Since day one of the COVID-19 outbreak, our government has taken action to ensure the people of our province are supported through these challenging times. And I am proud to say that my team at the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services, and our officials, have worked so hard to take an active role in supporting Ontarians through the outbreak. We have worked on several initiatives right from day one, and I would like to highlight a few of these.

The Ministry of Government and Consumer Services has provided ongoing support for the establishment of:

- Stop the Spread Business Information Line;
- Ontario Together line;
- the Consumer Protection Ontario price gouging line; and of course
- ServiceOntario general inquiry lines.

Thanks to these channels, the Ontario government was able to support anyone who had questions about the supply of personal protective equipment, known as PPE, essential services, price gouging, and other COVID-19 responses.

We also partnered with the Ministry of Transportation as well as the Ministry of Health to extend expiry dates for driver and vehicle products and services, accessible parking permits, and health cards. We are putting safety first, Speaker.

Our Ministry of government and consumer services also collaborated on and supported the introduction of legislation as well as regulatory changes to allow corporations to hold virtual meetings, defer annual general meetings, and file documents digitally and with electronic

signatures. I can tell you, Speaker: This initiative was very well received across the province.

At GCS, Government and Consumer Services, we also implemented regulatory changes under the Vital Statistics Act that allowed the electronic transmission of medical certificates of death by coroners, coroner investigators, funeral directors and municipalities to facilitate the timely issuance of burial permits. Again, this was a very sensitive step that we took. I appreciated everybody's support in making sure that we put the best interests of Ontarians as a priority and as our number one action in that regard, to make sure that families had the opportunity to be respected in a timely fashion with their burial permits.

I want to give a shout-out, actually, to our administrative authority, the Bereavement Authority of Ontario, for the amazing collaboration and effort that they put through this entire time. It has been non-stop. I really admire the work that they did, as well as all our other administrative authorities, to make sure that Ontarians felt supported.

I'd also like to share with everyone else in this House that to enable our government's plan to gradually and responsibly open our economy, we have also worked with partner ministries to support the successful launch of the Ontario Together Web portal and Workplace PPE Supplier Directory. I can tell you, in working with our federal minister, Minister Anand, and our provincial colleagues from one end of this nation to the other, they appreciated so much the manner in which Ontario led by example. These online resources have helped to enable all Ontarians to contribute to the province's response to COVID-19 in their own way by submitting innovative solutions and ideas—and innovative they were.

We appreciated everyone who came forward in the spirit of helping Ontarians work through and manage this pandemic. They volunteered their time to help people. They established a platform for businesses and private citizens to step up and help government identify priorities and fulfill those priorities by providing critical supplies and emergency equipment to support our front-line heroes in their fight against COVID-19.

In fact, since the launch of the Ontario Together portal, more than 28,000 submissions have led to over 18,000 emergency supply leads. It has just been phenomenal. Being on those calls and listening to the sincere interest and effort in terms of ideas and people wanting to get involved was nothing short of inspiring.

I have to tell you, Speaker, that those leads have led to more than \$662 million in purchases of critical supplies and equipment to support staff on the front lines, including more than 26 million gowns, 177 million pairs of gloves, 123 million masks and over four million face shields.

Most inspiring of all is that people wanted to set up production right here in Ontario. You have heard our Premier and the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade tout the amazing efforts that have come forward in the spirit of making sure that Ontario is never dependent on another jurisdiction when it comes to PPE.

We're going to be ready for the next wave, because it's very clear: All of these initiatives have provided real relief

for Ontarians, essential workers, as well as businesses. But there's always more that we could do.

We must work in partnership with people as well as businesses and municipalities to respond to the challenges they face and support the long-term health and prosperity of Ontario's economy.

That's why, on July 8, my colleague the Honourable Steve Clark, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, introduced Bill 197, the COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act, 2020. This act focuses on restarting jobs, strengthening communities and allowing our government to put the people of our province in a greater position to succeed.

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Speaker, we all know in this House that our province is Canada's economic engine, and we need to do everything we can to help it perform on all cylinders once again. If passed, Bill 197 would help create opportunities for businesses, streamline processes for some infrastructure projects, create jobs, help boost our economy and, above all, improve the quality of life for the people of our province. Quite frankly, that has been our goal since June 2018—to make life better and a little easier for Ontarians. I can tell you in no uncertain terms that our government is committed to Ontarians, and we are absolutely focused on making life easier by removing barriers, as well.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to speak to you and all of our colleagues in this House today about how our proposed amendments to the Marriage Act and the Payday Loans Act would, if passed, remove barriers for couples, and protect payday loan borrowers experiencing greater financial distress as a result of these unprecedented and challenging times.

The first proposal, to amend the Marriage Act, would extend the expiry date for most marriage licences that were not used during the province-wide declaration of emergency. My ministry heard from hundreds of couples who had their wedding plans impacted by COVID-19 and who had to make the difficult decision to postpone their special day. When the province-wide declaration of emergency was initially put in place, couples with upcoming marriage plans had to make difficult decisions.

Marriage is an important milestone for many couples and often involves investing significant time and money into planning the perfect day that includes family and friends. Making the decision to postpone such plans, and the overall uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 outbreak, has created a lot of stress for engaged couples. That is why we are proposing real solutions for couples whose marriage licences have gone unused as a result of COVID-19.

Couples who purchased their licence between December 1, 2019 and the last day of the province-wide declaration of emergency is in effect would be eligible. If a couple has an unused marriage licence that was issued during this time frame, and no critical information has changed, this amendment would extend the expiry of their marriage licence. The extension would be for 24 months from the end of the province-wide declaration of emergency. Eligible couples who have not used their marriage licence

would not need to visit a municipal office to replace their marriage licence, saving them time and money.

There are also some couples impacted by COVID-19 who will need to replace their marriage licence due to a change in their critical information since the licence was issued, or because the original unused licence was lost, destroyed or otherwise unavailable. In order to help these couples, we are proposing to waive the \$75 provincial fee and allow these couples to get a replacement licence within 24 months of the end of the province-wide declaration of emergency.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to acknowledge that municipalities are an important part of this approach to supporting engaged couples. They are responsible for issuing marriage licences in Ontario and, as such, we have worked closely with them on this proposal. I would like to thank Minister Clark and the AMO table for everything that they did to support, listen, exchange ideas and help make this amendment better.

Typically, marriage licences are valid for three months from the date of issue. To give you an example, Speaker, imagine what this has done for a couple with their wedding planned for April—maybe it sounds familiar to somebody in this room. They purchased a marriage licence in February before COVID-19 broke across the province. The fact of the matter is if this couple has held on to the marriage licence, the marriage licence extension, if approved, would mean one less hassle for them and would eliminate the need to revisit a municipal office to obtain a new licence.

We'll encourage residents to contact their municipality or check its website for information regarding services currently being offered. Some municipalities are also offering services where you can apply for the marriage licence online. One of the parties to the marriage must visit the municipality with their government-issued ID and any required documentation to purchase and obtain the licence. This type of service allows couples greater flexibility in completing and submitting their application, while minimizing in-person contact.

I want to thank our municipal partners, as I said, Mr. Speaker. We approached them to discuss how we could work together, and they were right there, ready to roll up their sleeves. A technical working group, including the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, known as AMO; the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario; several representative municipalities from around the province; and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing were able to work with us to develop this solution. As this is an unprecedented situation, it called for creative thinking on the parts of all partners, and I want to thank them.

Since the start of COVID-19, we have moved through phases of recovery, and couples have needed to make tough decisions, as I've alluded to. But we are working with these special couples, and we want to give them hope. We want to demonstrate that their government in Ontario is working with them. We want to provide public health information to couples to help with their planning, and we

want everyone attending a wedding to be safe and healthy. As such, public health guidelines must always be followed. I can't stress that enough.

The Marriage Act requires every Ontario marriage to be solemnized in the presence of the parties to the marriage; at least two witnesses and the marriage officiant, which makes a total of five individuals that need to be present at the ceremony. While five individuals represent the minimum number required to get married in Ontario, we know that couples want to experience their wedding as originally planned. They want to be in the presence of loved ones—maybe in loved ones' backyards, Speaker, as you might be well aware—and make their wedding a special, memorable occasion.

Many couples want to experience their wedding as originally planned, but I would like to point that while venue capacities are restricted to protect health and safety of event participants, there are options. Starting on July 17, 2020, certain areas of the province will move into stage 3, as we're all aware. As part of stage 3, attendance for indoor weddings are limited to no more than 50 attendees, and if held in a building or structure other than a private dwelling, are limited to no more than 30% of the designated capacity. Outdoor weddings are limited to no more than 100 attendees.

For both indoor and outdoor weddings, all persons attending must comply with public health guidance, as I mentioned before, on physical distancing. It is our goal that couples wanting to get married will be able to use the information provided and, if passed, benefit from the extension of the marriage licence expiry dates.

But this isn't the only measure that we're proposing today. Through the passage of Bill 197, our government would make much-needed changes that will help provide hard-working Ontarians with the financial relief that they deserve as we move forward on our gradual path to economic reopening and recovery. In Bill 197, our government is also proposing the following amendments to the Payday Loans Act that would help to protect those payday loan borrowers who are facing financial hardship and are dealing with high costs for loans in default.

Ontarians need to know the terms and conditions associated with this type of borrowing. The Payday Loans Act, 2008, and its regulations require lenders to display information that sets out the cost of a sample loan. Payday loan agreements are required to also include the cost of borrowing on the loan, and there are also requirements and regulations on representations made by payday lenders in advertising.

Currently, under the act, Ontario does not impose a cap on the interest rates that payday lenders may charge on the outstanding principal of a loan that is not repaid on time. Right now, some payday lenders charge annual interest rates of up to 60% on payday loans that are in default. As you may already know, payday loan users are often low-to-moderate-income earners. They're individuals already finding it difficult to access affordable credit through traditional banking options. During the COVID-19 pandemic, some people might rely on these loans even more, as

they're easily available as a source of short-term credit. So we're taking action now to protect our province's most vulnerable consumers.

Through Bill 197, we're proposing amendments that would establish a maximum interest rate of 2.5% per month, non-compounded, that may be charged on payday loans in default, and establish a maximum fee of \$25 that may be charged for dishonoured payments under a payday loan agreement. These changes would provide relief for some borrowers facing greater financial distress.

If approved, these changes would permanently come into effect 30 days after royal assent, and would continue to provide relief even after the pandemic. And Ontario would not be the only province with similar protective measures in place, if this bill passes. Ontario would join six Canadian provinces, including British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, New Brunswick and Newfoundland and Labrador, with a similar 2.5% maximum monthly interest rate on payday loans in default and a \$20-to-\$25 fee cap for dishonoured payments.

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But, Speaker, these are just two of the many great things my ministry is doing to support and protect Ontarians. Our government is currently conducting a review of the Consumer Protection Act, the first comprehensive review in almost 15 years. This review will help ensure that consumers are protected in everyday transactions, from buying clothing in a store to renovating their home.

As part of this review, the government will consider how to better protect vulnerable consumers of alternative financial services that are regulated under the CPA. As a first step, though, the government is gathering information through an online public survey about consumers' awareness and understanding of the act and their experiences when making consumer purchases. The survey includes some questions related to specific sectors, such as alternative financial services. We've even extended the closing date to ensure more Ontarians could participate and share their valued input with us. Again, we have extended the closing date to our consumer protection survey. The survey will now close on Friday, July 17. I would encourage all Ontarians to complete the survey, exercise their voice and have their say.

Speaker, I have shared this sentiment in the past, but I think it's very applicable to my discussion on consumer protection: "The people of Ontario need to feel confident that there are strong protections in place when they spend their hard-earned money. This is why we are changing outdated rules and taking a digital-first approach to delivering stronger protections that are responsive to the needs of consumers, while fostering the continued growth of a thriving economy" in Ontario.

Our online survey is just one of the ways we are consulting with Ontarians. The government will also consult with consumers and businesses through a posting on Ontario's Regulatory Registry later this year. Those interested in being involved in these consultations can email consumerpolicy@ontario.ca to be added to the ministry's

mailing list and notified about opportunities to provide input to inform the review.

Speaker, I stand in this House on a regular basis and say, "We want to listen to Ontarians. Their voice matters." We've demonstrated time and again that our vision is supported by being informed as Ontarians speak up and have their say. It demonstrates that we indeed are a government for the people.

The people of Ontario have endured so much over the last few months, and we want to make sure that everyone across this province and in every region of Ontario knows that they have a provincial government that is looking to rebuild, so that when it's safe, our children can return to school and people can get back to work. By passing this proposed legislation, we're putting the wheels in motion to do just that.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Questions?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I am glad to have the opportunity to ask the minister a question. She had spoken about personal protective equipment, and hopefully—my word, "hopefully"—a sustainable supply. We have been hearing from a number of different sectors and folks that they are challenged to get access to that PPE, that they're having to be innovative in how they procure, whether that's a hospital having to follow a hot tip to be able to buy a million gowns or whether that's talking to police locally, where they're helping the paramedics get masks—different things that just don't seem to be fitting.

I would ask if the minister would support using the facilities in Oshawa—currently, GM is making level 1 masks; they're now making, more in Michigan, the N95 masks. They could be making them in Oshawa and having a massive capacity and opportunity to have that made-in-Ontario solution, made-in-Canada solution. Is that something that the minister could get behind? And where can I direct the concerns for procurement? Because I don't find that in this bill.

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I appreciate that question very much. Again, as I started out early on in my debate this evening, I can't be prouder of the businesses that have stood up and said, "Government of Ontario, we want to be part of the solution." And it continues to this day. Through our portal, Ontario Together, people can go online and identify the suppliers of PPE. It's as easy as going to the website. Go to ontariotogether.com and you will find a whole host of suppliers in Ontario and across Canada, people who are standing up and saying, "Work with us. We will help you access PPE."

In terms of your question, are we open to more opportunities to produce in Ontario? Absolutely, we are. The answer is yes. Just this past week, we had our Premier and Minister Fedeli share not only with the province but across Canada that we are looking to stand up production of PPE made in Ontario; Ontario-made solutions that will address the demand for PPE.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Mississauga–Malton.

Mr. Deepak Anand: Mr. Speaker, through you, I want to ask the minister about an email I got from one of my residents. I'm going to read it out:

“Hello Deepak,

“I hope all is well and you’re keeping safe. I would like to know what will be done for marriage licences. I have obtained a marriage licence February 28, 2020. I was supposed to get married on March 28, 2020. However, due to the pandemic and border closing, I was not able to because my fiancée lives in another country. My marriage licence is due to expire May 28, 2020, and as you know, borders may not be open by that time and travel will be restricted. Is there currently a plan to extend the marriage licence or do refunds?”

Through you, Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the minister, with the government’s proposed legislation, will there be a fee to replace a marriage licence, and if they are allowed to extend, will there be a grace period for the marriage licences already issued?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: First of all, I want to commend the member from Mississauga–Malton for the amazing job that he does in representing his constituents in his riding. I had the opportunity to participate in a remarkable citizens’ program that the MPP hosted virtually online where he recognized the amazing contributions of citizens in Mississauga–Malton and how they contribute to and make their communities better. I just thought it was an awesome way, on the eve of Canada Day, to recognize outstanding people who want to make a difference. Making a difference is what this MPP is doing.

I would share, with all sincerity, that you can go back to your constituent who asked that question and let him know that 24 months after the end of the emergency declaration, his marriage licence will still be valid.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for London North Centre.

Mr. Terence Kernaghan: Thank you. I would like to ask a question: I noticed in the news that Goderich Mayor John Grace indicates that there’s a homelessness crisis within the city. Why are there no provisions to address the funding within shelters as part of the COVID recovery act?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: I appreciate that question very much from the member opposite. I’m very much aware of the homeless situation that the county of Huron has. I have to share with you that Mayor Grace will be excited to hear the prettiest town in Canada, the town of Goderich, referred to as a city. So thank you for that.

All that said, we are very mindful of the need to support our vulnerable people across this province. I have to commend the county of Huron warden on how well he and his staff are working with our local municipal leaders across every municipality in the county of Huron to address this situation. All levels of government have to work together, and I am pleased to say that’s exactly what we’re doing.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Richmond Hill.

Mrs. Daisy Wai: Thank you to our minister for all the acts you have been introducing in trying to protect our consumers. I know that you have just introduced the payday loans act to support our vulnerable consumers. Can you tell us a little bit more about that? Why do we need to introduce this?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Thank you to MPP Wai for this very important question because it’s something that—again, we need to demonstrate that our government is listening and our government understands that, during this pandemic, vulnerable citizens are finding it tough, and some of them actually have to access quick short-term credit. That is why we’re taking very seriously the need to address the issue of interest rates on loans that are defaulted.

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When we took a jurisdictional scan and we looked at British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Newfoundland and Labrador, as well as New Brunswick, we came to understand that for years, Ontario lagged behind other provinces, and we had to do our part. So we’ve really sincerely moved forward to ensure that on a monthly basis, interest charged on loans that were defaulted is reduced to 2.5%. Again, that’s 2.5% on a monthly basis. It puts us in the same stead, if you will, as other provinces across Canada.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Scarborough Southwest.

Ms. Doly Begum: Today we’re here debating Bill 197, the COVID recovery act. Essentially, this is supposed to be the plan for the economic recovery of our province, and here we are—this bill does not have anything to do with child care or education. It misses an essential part, Mr. Speaker.

My question to the minister is, how do you think this bill is sufficient when it doesn’t even touch upon the crisis that we have faced in long-term care, the crisis we are seeing in our child care spaces right now, and what working moms, working parents will have to do as soon as they’re asked to go back to work, which is happening already? How is this bill sufficient?

Also, the fact that we have brought this bill forward without consultation—I’ve heard ministers prior talk about how there will be consultation. Why is that justified?

Hon. Lisa M. Thompson: Mr. Speaker, I’d like to remind the member opposite that the consultation with municipalities just ended today. It’s my understanding from the members that participated in that review that, for all intents and purposes, they are pleased with the direction we are heading in.

I can tell you personally that the town hall that the Premier and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing hosted just a number of days ago—and they hosted hundreds of municipal leaders—was so incredibly well-received. Again, coming back to the leadership, municipal leadership in my county and my riding of Huron–Bruce were expressing gratitude because, clearly, through Bill 197, we are demonstrating that we listened to municipalities and we have listened to what Ontarians need to move forward and prosper and grow the economy.

I am very pleased to say that, in just a few moments, you’re going to hear from Minister Lecce exactly what we’re doing for education.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I don’t believe there’s enough time for another question and response, so we’ll move on. Further debate?

Ms. Marit Stiles: I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill. For those watching, we are debating Bill 197, which is the so-called COVID recovery act—and it is a privilege. I always say that—and I mean it—when I’m here, when I speak to a piece of legislation, or anything, really, because it is such a privilege to be in this place and to be able to be, in a way, the conduit for the comments and the thoughts of others who we’ve been consulting with, for example, on this legislation.

I think, really unfortunately, in this case this will be the only opportunity because, as we’ve already talked about, the government’s intention is to time-allocate this legislation, we know now, which means that these six and a half hours of debate now will be followed by third reading. There will not be any committee hearings, which is when, presumably—and I mean, often this government does limit the hours at committee as well, I will say. But at least there is some opportunity for members of the public, for associations who may have a particular interest as stakeholders to come and provide comment.

It’s really an extraordinarily important part of the legislative process because that’s when we have an opportunity as legislators to hear from folks who may just know a lot more about these things than we do, or be able to see, perhaps, previously unforeseen consequences to legislation. So it’s really critical. I think the best legislation is made when we have those opportunities for considered debate from others from outside and when we don’t have the pretense that we know everything here.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I have of course consulted with many of the associations, experts etc. on some aspects of this bill, particularly around education. I’ll be sharing some of their comments today, but I know that they’re finding out now about this unfortunate decision by the government and they’re very unhappy. I’m seeing already their reaction. They’re very, very unhappy about this, not surprisingly.

Mr. Speaker, I do want to note, before I get into some of the specifics around the Education Act-related changes here, that this bill does have some other very concerning provisions that I know people in my community of Davenport will be very concerned about and that others around the province will find concerning: major revisions to the environmental assessment process; dramatic increases in the power of ministers to override local planning decisions; changes to the justices of the peace appointment process that I think many have flagged already here that we fear could increase partisan appointments. And as we’ve heard some of my colleagues mention today already, increasing the ability of the Ford government to privatize government services, everything from online education to transit. That is something we have warned about previously. We have talked exhaustively about some of the issues around that for years now. Those are just a few of the very significant changes that are here in this legislation.

I also want to note, as we contemplate this legislation which is called the COVID recovery act, that there are many things missing in here. When I looked at this

legislation, which we got delivered to us a week ago today, actually, and I opened it up, I was excited: “Oh, my goodness, what is this going to prepare us for in Ontario? How is this going to help us with COVID recovery?” There are so many issues, so many things that people are looking for assistance and action from this government on. How incredibly disappointing it was. I mean, I actually thought I would have to spend hours going through it, sifting through all of it, and then literally it was like, “That’s it? What? Really?”

Not a single change to safeguard long-term-care residents or improve the quality of care or increase the staff wages. These are just a few—I’m going to list a few of the things I would have liked to see in the COVID recovery act. The bill doesn’t include a single dime for or really a mention of small and medium-sized businesses, which I can tell you are still struggling in my community and, I’m sure, in many of yours. In fact, every time I walk down the street in my riding, on the main streets more businesses are closing. It’s heartbreaking. And just as they’re trying to get going again, they’re facing the potential of eviction, even to this day—which is another thing, evictions.

Not only did this government not come up with a way to help tenants in this legislation, but they’ve actually introduced other legislation—which is being debated here this week and which I would not consider emergency legislation, but anyway—to actually make it easier to evict people. I can tell you, there is going to be a tsunami of evictions coming, which will devastate our communities and lead, as the member from Beaches–East York always reminds us, to a surge in homelessness and poverty.

The bill doesn’t include a single cent for municipalities, when we’re hearing that our cities across this province are desperate. They’re going to be cutting services that residents depend on, and I can guarantee you, those municipalities are going to make very clear to the residents of those towns exactly who is responsible, exactly who has not come through. And it will be this government that they will be pointing the finger at, which will be a really interesting one for the members opposite to deal with down the road because, I can assure you, once people start to lose those services they depend on, when they have to wait longer for the subway or the bus, when they’re desperate to get their kids into a recreation program because they are low-income and they have very few options—these are the things.

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The bill doesn’t provide paid sick days, which I’m going to talk about again—because there’s so much missing here that could have been accomplished, that could have gotten us closer to economic recovery. What we know—and we know this from all of the major economists, business associations, chambers etc.—is that economic recovery depends almost entirely, very much so, on the ability of families to get their children back to school and to have child care. Without that, people will not be able to return to work. They will not be able to return to their jobs, and as we know and as we’ve been saying

here in this House for weeks now, people are making that choice now. Families are making that choice.

Women overwhelmingly are the ones who will be making that choice, which—I just want to put a little pin in—I believe has the potential to reverse the many accomplishments of women over generations. It is potentially devastating, beyond just the actual economic impact, which is enormous. You take 40% of the workforce out, and now suddenly you lose all the taxes they pay. You lose all of that, not to mention their minds, their brilliance—gone, poof—to return home to oversee and supervise their children. Because, of course, that is, for all of us, always our number one priority—that our children are safe and healthy and cared for.

What this government has failed to do is to come up with a meaningful plan that would ensure that those schools would reopen accordingly, that parents could feel confident in leaving their children at school, or that child care centres could actually reopen. We've heard a lot of talk about how many child care centres are going to reopen, but I can assure you, it's not happening. It is not happening. Child care centres are not reopening. They can't, and I'll tell you why. I've been on the board of a child care centre, as a parent, in the past. My partner and I are both working parents. Our children were in child care from the time they were just under one year old, both of them. We relied on that place. It was a parent-run, not-for-profit child care centre. I was on the board and I can tell you how difficult it was every year to have to increase fees by 2%, 3%, knowing that all the families could not possibly afford it, but that you had to make that call because the cost of the supplies and everything was increasing accordingly—or rent. It's already a delicate balance for so many of our child care providers. Now they're saying, "We can't possibly run under this model, and we've had no support from the government."

It's a tragedy, and what I fear is that we're actually going to lose a lot of those centres. I know that in my community we are at risk of losing many because they also can't pay the rent. It's a disaster. If we lose spots—we all know; we struggled anyway for child care and to pay the fees. But I look across the way, and I think—is it a concern that women are sent home? Is it a concern that women would be pushed back into that life—that all of the accomplishments of the women's movement would be relegated to history? I don't know. Anyway, I digress.

I am going to talk about education, because there are a number of sections of the bill that relate to education. Before I start, I want to point out that I have been in touch with stakeholders from across the province, and I want to thank the Ministry of Education staff who did provide us with a briefing on the sections of the bill. In those briefings, I asked, at every point, "What kind of consultation took place here? What kind of consultation took place there?" And the answer was: "None." In fact, I think the only area where there was a commitment that there had been prior consultation was—a few years ago, there had been conversations about changing this element of the director of education.

That was unfortunate, because what I found as we were calling people to inform them of these changes is that they had just found out. Most of the major stakeholders—those affected, including all of the boards, had not been made aware until just before the legislation was introduced. So there's no pretense, even, of consultation.

I want to talk to you about a few of the elements here and some of the concerns we have, because, again, we're not going to get another opportunity, by the looks of it. So hopefully—hoping that the government will actually put the brakes on this and either allow for some consultation and some outsiders to come in and share their expertise or, I don't know, amend the legislation. I'm just hoping.

TVO/TFO: One of the things that the government is doing here is essentially having TVOntario/TFO become the administrator, I guess you could say, of online education in the province. That's a very brief summary, but that's kind of what is happening here. When we were talking to the ministry staff, we asked specifically—because one of the major concerns that's being raised is that this would allow for the opening up, as TVO/TFO oversee this, of the entry of for-profit, private providers of online education into the system. When I asked that question, I did not actually get a no, which concerned me somewhat. What I got was, "Well, there are not-for-profits involved to some degree," and I said, "Okay, well, that's interesting, but what you're not saying to me is that that's not a possibility here." So that's concerning.

The other issue very concerning to the Catholic boards is that the Catholic boards want Catholic educators working on the curriculum, be it online or otherwise—and the French board, of course, has major concerns with this. Let's be clear: They have an existing infrastructure, quite well developed, to provide online education. They have constitutional rights as well. So I think the government may be seeing some legal action down the road on this one.

But first of all, I just want to say, again: no consultation on this. We know what this government's agenda is, despite the massive failure of even this remote emergency distance learning, and we've seen it. We still haven't seen the expansion of broadband that we need to see in many parts of this province. That this government is continuing down this road is astonishing to me.

The next thing—and others have mentioned it already today—is the changes to the qualifications that the director of education has to have, and essentially the removal of the requirement that they have been a teacher at some point. I have to tell you, having been a trustee and actually been on the search committee for the director of education at the TDSB, who was Dr. John Malloy, very well lauded, very respected: guess what—a former teacher. Yes. I don't like to get into the details of all this too much, but when the government says that this is an equity issue, we should talk, because when you look outside and you broaden up those criteria and they use examples of, "Well, in hospitals"—you should check out what a director of education makes. You should check out their executive compensation. I'm not advocating that it be increased; I'm just saying, if you want to talk about actually being able to

attract talent, that might be a place to start. And by the way, a lot of the educators who are being mentored up through the system are BIPOC.

There is room and opportunity—and in fact, it requires that kind of time and effort, not just changing a little definition here and going out and finding your Conservative buddies to fill these roles. Good luck with that, because that's what people out there think you're doing. That is the concern here, and I think it's a very real concern. Certainly I feel very strongly, as do many in the education sector, that a crucial part of the role of the director of education is pedagogy—being a teacher leader. It's crucial, and to take that out shows a deep lack of understanding of education and how it works and what's important, frankly.

I do want to mention another thing, which is the ending of suspensions. I'm not going to argue against the ending of suspensions. There's no question; we know that suspensions and expulsions disproportionately impact Black and Indigenous students all the time. So I'm not disappointed with that piece here. What's deeply disappointing is the lack of recognition in this legislation of the need to actually put the effort into additional resources and time and staff and supports to make that work.

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Again, what we keep seeing are these flashy headlines on the equity side of things, “We're going to end suspensions for the little kids.” “Oh, boy, we're going to destream grade 9.” A school in my riding was one of the first in Ontario to destream grade 9 recently, in the last couple of years: Oakwood Collegiate Institute. Hello, Principal Yee. Thank you so much for all you have done. This school is an amazing school.

A few years ago, the teachers got together with the new principal, and they said, “One of the biggest problems we have is, we have all these students, largely Black students, coming into the school and they're being streamed by their grade 8 teachers and guidance counsellors into applied math etc. We want to change that.” What was crucial about that was that they went through a period, about a year, to get it right, and they actually did it with the agreement of the director of education and the board, of course, but they were also able to negotiate having smaller class sizes and additional teacher support, and it was critical to success.

So what's different there than what we're seeing here? The voice of teachers, the voice of students, the expertise of the front-line educators, which is missing, crucially, from all of these changes—very unfortunate. I think like in any sector, in anything, if you're not going to the people who really do the work—for example, in this COVID-19 recovery, if you're not asking the front-line educators how that 15-student classroom is going to work, what it's going to involve? How many bathrooms are in the school? Where are the issues with space in the school? If you're not asking them that, you're missing a big part of the picture.

I think today when the Toronto District School Board released the details of what it was going to involve to get to this place, I'm sure a lot of people are shocked. I wasn't so shocked, because I've been listening to what the

teachers are saying, what the experts are saying—what the parents are saying, what the boards are saying, and this is where this legislation is going to fail and everything this government does is going to fail when they don't consult; they refuse to listen. They ram legislation through.

Our province deserves better, all the people in our province deserve better and all those parents deserve better. Thank you very much.

Interjection.

Ms. Marit Stiles: And thank you so much for your kind comments. I know you weren't listening, but I'm glad you perked up at the end there—very respectful.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): It's now time for questions.

Mr. Jeremy Roberts: I appreciate the presentation from the member for Davenport. I have a genuine question, though. The member spoke a lot about her fear of this change with the director of education qualifications and us moving in a direction where we are going to allow people to apply for the job—even if they aren't a teacher, we're going to look for the best person qualified.

When we look at a good comparison to school boards, we can look at hospitals and hospital CEOs. Now, hospital CEOs do not have to be doctors or medical professionals. In fact, one of our best hospital CEOs in Ottawa, I would argue, Alex Munter, is in fact a former city councillor. Does the member opposite believe that hospitals should also be changed to only medical professionals or—in that situation, does she believe that it should be the best person qualified, as we are arguing should be the case for boards of education?

Ms. Marit Stiles: I appreciate the question. I know Mr. Munter quite well, actually. He's a good friend of mine. Thanks for mentioning him. I think he's great.

It's a totally different scenario than when you're talking about school boards. I think the members opposite also need to understand there are many different staff at a school board. The director of education is the lead, but there are also all kinds of other people there who are doing a lot of the administrative, financial etc. work. That's what makes it work well.

My greatest concern in all of this, actually, is the ability of this minister—this government are giving themselves the ability under regulation to determine the duties and powers of directors of education. That, to me, is more of a concern. I trust what teachers are telling me, and others—trustees, directors of education, principals, superintendents—are saying, “We really expect that role to be an educational lead. It's not just a CEO.” I think that is critically different.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Thank you to the member from Davenport for her comments—always a passionate advocate for education.

I'd like to ask about the effect of the lack of planning around child care. I met with early childhood educators in my area. They were saying that, throughout this process and then heading into September, they had problems

understanding where the government is at with this. We've had some increases in numbers, but still we know it's insufficient, and there's very little guidance from this government. Have you heard some of those comments?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you so much for your question.

I should say, the member for Scarborough Southwest is definitely more of a child care expert than me, but I do have some experience, and certainly you can't really separate the two things. The schools returning and the child care reopening are critical. They have to work together.

There are so many issues right now—as I mentioned, definitely issues around actually how they logistically can reopen and how they can do that without increasing fees dramatically, but also things like after-school. A lot of daycares are providing after-school, and they're doing it in school buildings often—usually, it's a room in a school. So the logistics of how they're going to manage that, cleaning out the classrooms—a lot of child care centres and parents are very concerned that those after-school programs will no longer exist.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Scarborough Centre.

Miss Christina Maria Mitas: It's funny—the member opposite said, “I thought I'd have to spend hours going through it, and then I read it, and I thought that was it.” It sounds like she's disappointed that Bill 197 is too short. And the rest of you on that side are saying, “There's too much. There's a plethora. You're trying to hide everything.” So I'm wondering, which is it? Get your story straight.

But you want to hear from a teacher? Here you go: The school in your riding destreaming grade 9—that's great for them. That was a pilot project. We are making it permanent. We have made tangible changes that are helping children from diverse backgrounds. As a former school trustee, how can you sit there and be cavalier about putting an end to suspensions for the little kids, as you said? How can you sit there and be cavalier about it? We are making tangible, good change that is predominantly having good effects and positive effects on BIPOC children. You should be ashamed, as the education critic, of making light of that.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I will try to thank the member opposite for her question. I've got to tell you, I think that's a little bit overboard. Of course, I actually said I have no problem with the ending of suspensions for small children—and, in fact, I'd like to see a whole reform of suspensions and expulsions.

The problem with this legislation is, it just simply says, “No suspensions.” It doesn't say, “Here are the resources,” and that is what the educators are telling us they need. They need supports in the classroom.

Interjection.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Yes, they need it. You know what? Maybe you should try going to a classroom someday, because I can assure you—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Order. Order.

Interjections.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Oh, right, right—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Davenport will take her seat.

Perhaps it's necessary for the Speaker to remind the members, that even though we're doing questions and answers, to make your comments through the Chair—and we would hope to have a continued civil debate over the next little while, while we're here Wednesday night.

The member for Davenport has the floor.

Ms. Marit Stiles: As I said, again, we know that the suspensions for younger children have to be ended; we've even been advocating for this. I guess what I'm concerned about is that the—

Interjection.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Mr. Speaker, she's continuing.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): I would ask the member for Scarborough Centre to allow the member for Davenport to answer the question that you asked, please, without interruption.

The member for Davenport.

Ms. Marit Stiles: What I'm trying to explain is that we know that when these suspensions end, there will still need to be additional supports for those students. Whether they're dealing with whatever issues, there's going to need to be additional support.

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We also know, by the way, that a lot of those suspensions are linked as well to special needs or learning issues. We need to be able to identify those early, and that is going to mean additional supports for those students.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The member for Algoma-Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I always enjoy being in the House when the member from Davenport stands and takes her place and talks on behalf of her constituents and her experience and her interactions with stakeholders on education. But she also started off by reminding me immensely about my role as an MPP.

I'm speaking to the good people of Algoma-Manitoulin right now; most of you are at home. In regard to this process, the debate will stop tonight. Then we're going to shift into a time allocation, which is going to limit us to two hours of debate, in order to complete the discussions on this. This takes away from my ability as an MPP, because next week I don't think I will have the opportunity to speak further to Bill 197, which is the economic recovery act.

My question to the member, which is on education, is, in this economic recovery act—we know that we have to get our children into our schools. If we're going to recover this economy—it's making sure that they are there so that the moms and dads can get in. In this act, is there a fully detailed plan in regard to the reopening of our schools in September? Is there something in here which will address the broadband needs for northern communities? And is there, in here, something that will supplement the needs for teachers in our schools?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Thank you very much to the member. I really appreciated that question.

As it happens, we have put forward a proposal that includes many of those elements, including the expansion of broadband, the hiring of more teachers and other educational staff, the use of additional spaces where necessary, or mothballed classrooms if possible, to be able to ensure there are more smaller classes available.

We've also talked about ensuring that access to emergency child care for front-line workers doesn't end, and we've talked about funding for transportation, school buses, so they can ensure physical distancing, which I can tell you is a major concern for the boards across this province that I have spoken with—and of course, paid sick leave for parents who are going to be feeling sometimes like they can't afford to not take their child to school if they are not feeling well. This would actually protect them.

Unfortunately, none of this was included in this legislation.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): We have time for one last question.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I just wanted to pick up on something that the member for Algoma-Manitoulin talked about. He talked about time allocation and the fact that there's not going to be a lot of time for debate, but the opposition, of course, has delayed debate on this for two days. They had an opportunity to provide amendments. The amendment that they put forward was basically that the bill be now not read a second time. That's it. That's what they put forward, that the bill not be read a second time.

So I'm wondering why the member—she has a lot of good ideas—why those were not put in—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you. Prompt reply.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I couldn't tell, Mr. Speaker, if that was really a question for me or for my colleague here, but I will say that this is a very different issue from I what I raised. What I raised wasn't about the time allocation per se; it was about the failure of this government to actually consult, to provide those committee days—

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much. Further debate.

Hon. Stephen Lecce: Thank you very much for the opportunity to address this legislation. Obviously, I'm quite pleased to rise in support of the economic recovery act here in the Legislature. Of course, this bill includes various provisions to improve, to modernize and reform the education system in the province of Ontario.

We face an unprecedented challenge in our province. I think before we proceed, we should recognize the strengths in our democracy: the fact that we are able to have these discussions, the fact that we are able to have closed calls with our critics or that we're able to hear from their perspectives or give briefings—these types of things I think are important. I think what the bill reflects is the priorities of, yes, our stakeholders—but perhaps the single greatest stakeholder in this province is the parents and the

taxpayers of this province who have urged government to take action to improve the quality of education.

I just want to acknowledge, if I may, my parliamentary assistant, the member from Niagara West, for his incredible leadership, for working so hard over the past weeks to listen to parents, listen to students and, of course, listen to educators and their staff.

I also want to give a shout-out to the workers within our system—our educators, our education staff, our directors, everyone involved in the system, in the education ecosystem—who have really stepped up in a very profound way, knowing that they have families and they have pressures. They have demonstrated, I think, the very best of the human condition, which is to do whatever it takes to make a difference for your community and for your country. I think they are indeed reflective of our praise.

Speaker, we have endeavoured to inform the system. Respectfully, we are not the political party in this Legislature that will defend the status quo. We were brought in with a mandate to improve it. Notwithstanding as inexpedient or tough as those reforms may be, they are necessary. Not starting in any particular order—but I will start with one element that has come up in this House in the context of ensuring a meritocracy: that the best educator, the best leader, the best administrator rises to the top. That shouldn't be, I would submit, a particularly controversial statement. I would argue that really should be the aspiration, especially when it comes to our children, the next generation. We want them to be in front of the best people, whoever they may be, from all diverse backgrounds.

Today, in some respects, we are celebrating a director of education in Toronto, Carlene Jackson. Many of the members opposite are from Toronto. Carlene is the first Black female director of education in our province. That, I think, is very special. She has spent 20 years in public sector leadership. She's a CPA by profession, but she has a deep passion for equity, as well as a deep passion for public education. It's interesting: In Carlene's case, she's not a teacher. What's fascinating is the unanimity of the Toronto board. Every single trustee in Toronto asked me to, essentially, amend a regulation to permit that individual, the best individual, to rise to the top, and of course, Speaker, within 24 hours I did so.

Speaker, we have a duty to ensure the best person runs what are often multi-faceted, deeply complex multi-billion dollar corporations. The fact is that the Toronto District School Board, where members opposite hail from, unanimously chose this individual, knowing her deep experience in education, yes, but also her professional competence as a CPA. They thought she was the right person. That speaks volumes. It is a contemporary example, because the proof point cannot be more relevant today. Today, she commences her term. Today, John Malloy ends his, and we express our gratitude for his incredible leadership in Toronto.

But the fact is, Speaker, when it comes to this reform, we need to ensure that the right person, the best person,

gets the job. I spoke to the Attorney General, my colleague, some months ago, and he had noted to me this concept that in health care, they have moved away—to be fair, the public service leadership—of having doctors run these hospitals. The question, fundamentally, is: What is different? I actually am not sure I heard a very compelling or cogent response to the very effective question raised of what is the difference, actually. What is the difference? We want professionals who are running multi-billion dollar asset classes, with often hundreds of thousands of students that they're managing, and of course responsible for tens of thousands of staff.

Now, I know many boards will continue to utilize the incredible talents of educators, no doubt. This change does not preclude their ability to choose an educator, but expands that. I would submit to the members opposite who challenge the premise on equity—to the member from Beaches—East York, who criticized the concept of this amendment, suggesting that this is an appalling act—right now, in the province of Ontario, and I say this with great respect and reverence for directors in the province of Ontario, we have less than 4% of directors from visible minority communities. We can do better than 4%. We could aspire to choose merit-based individuals, highly qualified, but yes, who also happen to better reflect the communities we represent and where we live. That is not a target or a benchmark I am prepared to defend. We are not prepared to defend that. We expect better of our boards to select qualified individuals; yes, of diversity, and of professional diversity as well. That's why this amendment, we believe, is so important to get right.

Speaker, there are 20 directors of education who have noted that they're going to be retiring or that have signalled they will be retiring in very short order. We have a generational opportunity to get this right, and I believe now is the time to get on with it.

We also have an opportunity to diversify our workforce in our schools. If we are going to be agents of change and defend the interests of students—which is why, I would submit, we are here—then we must be prepared to do what is right to ensure that the regulations that are within the Education Act and are reflected within our system—ensure that, indeed, diversity is an aspiration we can achieve.

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In many schools—and I know this in Peel, as we know this in many boards, as I often speak with the members from Mississauga and Brampton and many other regions—the issue is well-defined. There are schools with over 50% of kids from racialized communities and disproportionately small numbers of educators and education staff who reflect that experience.

Now, I believe in a meritocracy. I believe qualified educators must rise to the top. But to preclude a principal from choosing a merit-based educator who happens to be of that diaspora, that ethnocultural background, is utterly preposterous and antithetical to the principle of merit that we strive for. When it comes to our children, from a pedagogical perspective, what more do we want than to have the best educator with the qualifications and the specialized learning that could help your child succeed in

life? That is what we seek. It's why we have made clear that we will advance that within these reforms.

But even above and beyond that, when we look at the broader frame of equity, I would not trivialize these changes. I will argue that many members of all parties in this House, including some today, have called for these very changes. I appreciate their advocacy, because on the issue of optimizing ability, really equalizing the playing field and giving dignity back to every single child—this should not be a matter of politics. I believe there should be some element of unity of purpose in the Legislature, to say that when we know in the context of streaming, when 25% of all students are streamed to applied, but in Toronto—and I use Toronto only as an example because their data is public. They're one of the few boards that is providing that racialized data, which our announcement helps to fix. But when 25% of all students are streamed to applied, but in Toronto, 47% of Black kids are streamed to applied, with less than 20% for non-Black kids, we know there is a problem.

When you go through the data, you understand that those kids who are streamed—in this case, those Black children I spoke of in Toronto—are four and a half times more likely not to graduate. Only one third will seek and actually pursue post-secondary education. The problem is well-known, but to be fair, it has been known to governments for generations. We now have an opportunity to not just get it right but align our efforts with the OECD, which has called for streaming to be in the more latter grades—certainly grade 10 at the beginning, or grade 11 and beyond. We're the only jurisdiction in the country that does it in grade 9. It is this Progressive Conservative government, yes, that's going to get it right and bring an end to that for all students in the province of Ontario.

In the context of suspensions, again, I would argue this is a pretty profound change. There has been significant advocacy from a variety of groups. And I appreciate that the member opposite has raised that it applies, yes, to racialized communities, but also to special education kids. That actually is important and something that is somewhat lost in this debate. But when 3% of all kids are suspended and we see 40% of Black students in Toronto are suspended at least once, compared to non-Black kids at roughly 18%—so more than twice the rate of suspension, disproportionately impacting Black children. And we're talking about kids in kindergarten, grade 1, grade 2 or grade 3. We're talking about really innocent young minds. With respect, this is not a data point that we can just go along with.

In Toronto, Black students are representative of 11% of the student population, and yet in the context of suspensions, it's 34%; in Peel, roughly 10% of the population, but 22.5% of suspension rate—twice the rate in Peel, three times the rate in Toronto. Folks, there is something wrong with the system. When the Premier says it is broken, respectfully, while we have a superior system of advanced education—and I am incredibly proud. One of our greatest strengths is our skilled workforce, our talented, dynamic young women and men who enter and exit our education system, our public education. We're proud of it. We know

we do it well, but we can do it better. And that is the change narrative that we seek to advance in this debate, but also within this province. We need to do that. The time for action is now.

Speaker, in the context of investments, we have spoken often about this area of suspensions. It was noted that these suspensions are overrepresented for Black, Indigenous, male and LGBTQS students; for children in care, those with special needs—50% of suspensions affecting special-needs kids. I believe we can do better. How do we do that? Well, we've set aside, within the Grants for Student Needs, over \$40 million to support all school boards in the transition, supporting them with a more restorative approach to justice, not a punitive one, for kids who fundamentally ought to be learning and changing behaviour through the support of their educator and their school.

We've also announced an ancillary investment of \$10 million in mental health. In that \$10-million increase—this is on top of the province's historic doubling of mental health in Ontario—we have dedicated \$1 million of that \$10 million specifically for racialized kids on this very issue, to give them better opportunities and better pathways to success.

The Indigenous and Black graduate program through the PPF that I announced—over \$300 million in funding to support a variety of programs that really lift kids up and give them hope and that opportunity they deserve. In that context, we've set aside \$3.5 million to sustain that program, to make sure young people get access to incredibly talented coaches and leaders in their communities. I am honestly proud of the work that has been done in this area.

We've also said, Speaker, that in the context of professional development, we need to do better. I've said it clearly to the federation partners, to the presidents directly, as well as to school boards and the chairs and directors. We need to do better at improving our training regime in the province. It's not a comment on the motives or the altruism of people who enter education. It's vocational; they love kids. I know that. We all know that. But at the end of the day, we could all professionally develop and be better in our endeavour to teach our kids.

One area that we need to do better at, indeed, is tackling the issue of discrimination. Speaker, when we see many challenges within our school boards, with many kids facing discrimination in their classes, I would argue there is a need for better training of our teachers, for mandatory training of all education staff.

I am proud that, in consultation and collaboration with the trustees' associations across the province, English and French, we have got them on board to agree to ensure mandatory training of all trustees in Ontario, which is historic and has not been done in the context of discrimination and anti-racism training. That's an important step forward. It's going to help change the hearts and minds of our political leaders, of our educators, and of course, of our students in the classroom.

We obviously know that, when it comes to empowering young people to succeed—it also ensures that we have a system that's responsive to their priorities, not the

priorities of any member of the House or special interests. It's really got to be about our students. What we're hearing, in 2020 no less, is that young people want access to the online market, the virtual literacy that is required to get a decent-paying job in this country and, to be fair, in the industrialized world today.

So what we have done is we have empowered TVO and TFO, which are incredible agencies that throughout my life and for a generation have been inspiring young minds in both official languages to learn. I joined my parliamentary secretary and the Minister of Francophone Affairs some months ago to celebrate the one billionth view on YouTube on TFO's platform. That is not inconsequential. They are one of the leading digital platforms when it comes to education in the country—and of course, no less a francophone advocacy right here in the province of Ontario. I'm proud of that. And TVO: 18,000 students were educated through the ILC, through their learning program. This is an incredible demonstration that we have capacity. While the members opposite perhaps would submit quite a stand-alone bureaucracy and spend tax dollars we do not have, I would rather utilize the agencies that exist, that are credible, that are led by Ontario-certified teachers, with a record of decades, certainly, of quality education.

We're going to utilize them because, to be quite frank, in a matter of months, or in a matter of weeks—we'll be back in September. We made a commitment to ensure that students have access to online learning. There are 90 courses today, about 50 in French and 40 in English. We're going to procure, using those agencies, an additional 10—five in French and five in English for September and five in French and five in English for January. Speaker, what's fascinating about the concept is, at the end of the day, we're ensuring Ontario-certified teachers provide it. We provide more optionality to students.

Respectfully, all of our caucuses are diverse. I think it is unfair, and I think it almost has an element of urban privilege, to suggest that expanding course offerings for online learning is a bad outcome. Students in Kenora may not have the specialized courses or economies of scale in their school to have all the courses that folks in my riding or many of yours have. But by giving them access to virtual learning, we could help provide and universalize that experience, diversify their knowledge, and give them better access to courses to give them a pathway to a STEM career. So, Speaker, we're doing that.

We are obviously consulting. To be very clear, in the context of TFO and TVO, this element of the legislation will not come into force until consultation is done. We're making sure that we are listening to those voices. But at the end of the day, we're ensuring that we have more course offerings for students this September, which is our obligation.

That includes, Speaker, a commitment to our denominational rights for Catholic and French or minority communities. We absolutely recognize the importance from a constitutional perspective, and we are doing that in real time.

I also just want to note very briefly about some of the broader reforms we've brought in, in the context of that reform agenda, that change agenda that I speak about. While tangential, I would argue that modernizing the qualification of a director, ensuring more diversity in the classroom, ensuring a more equitable program for students from racialized and low-income communities are good things, but they have to be complemented by a curriculum that actually is going to help these young people succeed. I am very pleased that we have updated our math curriculum, with an emphasis on coding and financial literacy, and for the first time in this province, social and emotional learning. What time better than today to introduce a math curriculum, this September—with social and emotional, mental health elements embedded in the curriculum, at a time when our kids will probably need that additional level of support?

In the context of those children who need the most support, we also look to our children within our demonstration schools. I've been really pleased to have incredible advocacy from so many members. Obviously, the member from Milton, the member from the Bay of Quinte, and of course members from London and Ottawa and right across Ontario have called for the expansion and double cohorting of these kids. Those students in provincial schools, as you will all know, are kids with a nominative exceptionality.

I have been to the E.C. Drury school, the Trillium school in Milton—really an incredible school. When I was there, I met this young girl named Vicky. I happened to host her at the Legislature, meet her amazing aunt Joy, her guardian. Vicky has been an incredible advocate for the demonstration school. When we had to close schools, it was a tough decision, notwithstanding that it was the right decision for public health. But the impact of that closure meant that a young child who got a one-year residential program with some of the best educators in our province, with specialized supports and experiential learning—that had to close, and that really broke their hearts.

So when we permitted a double cohort, before I made that announcement, I called Vicky, and I told her that it is because of her—and I mean it. It literally is because of the voices of all members—of course, our caucus led the way.

But Vicky, respectfully, was perhaps the most compelling—this young woman literally urging the Ministry of Education to make this change. I was so moved, so impressed and inspired by her leadership. Obviously, the cabinet decided and the caucus decided that it would be the right thing to do to permit a double cohort for those kids specifically.

Speaker, I think what we've demonstrated is, when it comes to education, we are going to make sure that the system is responsive to the economic needs of our province and our country, to give opportunity to young people who no longer—we have to accept as a point in this Legislature that the young people have twice the rate of youth unemployment. It is a continued reality for young people in this House. I'm proud to have no less than 13 millennials within our party. I'm proud to have that diversity of experience and opinion. I'm proud to be joined by an educator—by two educators, no less—within our caucus that I'm aware of, and by a variety of parents, moms and dads, taxpayers and hard-working folks who simply want to ensure that the next generation of our province and country is set up to succeed.

Speaker, I'm going to continue on that mission to drive change, and I look forward to the support of all members to achieve that for our kids.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 50(c), I'm now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there have been six and one-half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader directs the debate to continue.

I look to the government House leader.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Not this evening, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): The government House leader has directed that the debate not continue this evening.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): Orders of the day. Government House leader?

Hon. Paul Calandra: No further business.

The Speaker (Hon. Ted Arnott): No further business this evening. This House stands adjourned until next Monday, July 20, at 10:15.

The House adjourned at 1934.

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Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

**Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs /
Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques**

Chair / Président: Amarjot Sandhu
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jeremy Roberts
Ian Arthur, Stephen Blais
Stan Cho, Stephen Crawford
Catherine Fife, Randy Hillier
Mitzie Hunter, Andrea Khanjin
Laura Mae Lindo, Sol Mamakwa
David Piccini
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Julia Douglas

**Standing Committee on General Government / Comité
permanent des affaires gouvernementales**

Chair / Présidente: Goldie Ghamari
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Daryl Kramp
Robert Bailey, Jessica Bell
Goldie Ghamari, Chris Glover
Mike Harris, Daryl Kramp
Sheref Sabawy, Amarjot Sandhu
Mike Schreiner, Jennifer (Jennie) Stevens
Daisy Wai
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

**Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité
permanent des organismes gouvernementaux**

Chair / Président: John Vanthof
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Taras Natyshak
Will Bouma, Lorne Coe
Rudy Cuzzetto, Robin Martin
Taras Natyshak, Rick Nicholls
Billy Pang, Amanda Simard
Marit Stiles, Nina Tangri
John Vanthof
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Tonia Grannum

**Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de
la justice**

Chair / Président: Roman Baber
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Roman Baber, Will Bouma
Lucille Collard, Parm Gill
Natalia Kusendova, Suze Morrison
Lindsey Park, Gurratan Singh
Nina Tangri, Effie J. Triantafilopoulos
Kevin Yarde
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Thushitha Kobikrishna

**Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité
permanent de l'Assemblée législative**

Chair / Président: Kaleed Rasheed
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Vijay Thanigasalam
Rima Berns-McGown, Michael Coteau
Faisal Hassan, Logan Kanapathi
Jim McDonell, Christina Maria Mitas
Sam Oosterhoff, Kaleed Rasheed
Sara Singh, Donna Skelly
Vijay Thanigasalam
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent
des comptes publics**

Chair / Présidente: Catherine Fife
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: France Gélinas
Deepak Anand, Jill Andrew
Toby Barrett, Stan Cho
Stephen Crawford, Catherine Fife
John Fraser, France Gélinas
Christine Hogarth, Norman Miller
Michael Parsa
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité
permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

Chair / Président: Deepak Anand
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Will Bouma
Deepak Anand, Toby Barrett
Stephen Blais, Will Bouma
Stephen Crawford, Laura Mae Lindo
Gila Martow, Paul Miller
Billy Pang, Dave Smith
Jamie West
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Isaiah Thorning

**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Chair / Présidente: Natalia Kusendova
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Aris Babikian
Aris Babikian, Jeff Burch
Amy Fee, Michael Gravelle
Joel Harden, Mike Harris
Christine Hogarth, Belinda C. Karahalios
Terence Kernaghan, Natalia Kusendova
Robin Martin
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

**Select Committee on Emergency Management Oversight /
Comité spécial de la surveillance de la gestion des situations
d'urgence**

Chair / Président: Vacant
Vacant, Vacant
Vacant, Vacant
Vacant, Vacant
Vacant, Vacant
Vacant, Vacant
Vacant
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell